

# NEWCOMER ASSIMILATION INTO A GLOBALLY DISTRIBUTED PROJECT

Master's Thesis  
Jessica Luostarinen  
Aalto University School of Business  
Information and Service Management  
Spring 2018





---

<b>Author</b> Jessica Luostarinen		
<b>Title of thesis</b> Newcomer assimilation into a globally distributed project		
<b>Degree</b> Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration		
<b>Degree programme</b> Information and Service Management		
<b>Thesis advisor(s)</b> Emma Nordbäck		
<b>Year of approval</b> 2018	<b>Number of pages</b> 116	<b>Language</b> English

---

## **Abstract**

Newcomer assimilation is the process through which new hires are integrated into their role and their organization. Previously, most of the assimilation literature has focused on co-located and established organizations and projects. However, the use of geographically distributed work forms is constantly increasing in organizations due to the rush of advanced technologies, through which experts can collaborate from anywhere and anytime. With the help of these technologies, organizations can reach new markets and hire new skillful employees that may be difficult to find locally. As the work setting is changing from local to global, the previous assumptions about what helps newcomers assimilate are challenged. To date, there is a lack of research on newcomer assimilation in the virtual context, and in particular, how newcomers of a new subsidiary assimilate into existing R&D department, which at the same time go through a shift from operating locally to operating globally.

The purpose of this thesis is to begin to bridge these gaps in literature and to study what factors affect newcomers' assimilation into a newly established distributed software development project, where company insiders are located at a distant site, and are used to operating only locally. This study adopts a single case study in a Finnish software company, which has established a new distant site for its R&D department to enable hiring more skilled software developers. Field observations and semi-structured interviews are used to collect data and to obtain first-hand experiences from both sides to form an inclusive understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Therefore, 19 newcomers and 10 insiders, who have a key role in the newly distributed project or who were involved in newcomers' assimilation process, are interviewed. The collected data is then analyzed as prescribed by Gioia method.

The results of this thesis show that, in the virtual context, newcomer assimilation is likely to occur through both face-to-face and virtual means. Face-to-face activities are found to be vital for successful assimilation, since newcomers fail to receive enough cues and rich information over virtual means. In addition, an assimilation gap was identified as a new phenomenon in the research field, showing how different perceptions among newcomers and insiders, e.g. related to their rate of assimilation, are likely to burst into misunderstandings and conflicts, lowering the success of newcomers' assimilation. A lack of common work practices and unmet expectations are likely to hinder newcomers' assimilation success.

---

**Keywords** newcomer assimilation, assimilation gap, socialization tactics, face-to-face activities, virtual activities, software company, distributed project

---

---

**Tekijä** Jessica Luostarinen

---

**Työn nimi** Uusien työntekijöiden sopeutuminen globaalisti hajautuneeseen projektiin

---

**Tutkinto** Kauppatieteiden maisteri

---

**Koulutusohjelma** Tieto- ja palvelutalous

---

**Työn ohjaaja(t)** Emma Nordbäck

---

**Hyväksymisvuosi** 2018

---

**Sivumäärä** 116

---

**Kieli** Englanti

---

**Tiivistelmä**

Uusien työntekijöiden sopeutuminen (assimilaatio) viittaa prosessiin, jonka kautta uudet työntekijät sopeutuvat uuteen rooliinsa ja organisaatioonsa. Suurin osa tähän liittyvästä kirjallisuudesta on aiemmin keskittynyt olemassa oleviin ja samassa paikassa toimiviin organisaatioihin ja projekteihin. Nykyään organisaatiot ovat kuitenkin yhä enemmän maantieteellisesti hajautuneita teknologian kehityksen ansiosta, kun tiimit voivat kommunikoida ja tehdä yhteistyötä mistä ja milloin vain. Tämän kehityksen ansiosta yritykset voivat saavuttaa uusia markkinoita ja palkata osaavaa työvoimaa, jota voi olla vaikeaa löytää paikallisesti. Työympäristön muutokset paikallisesta globaalimpaan suuntaan haastavat aiemmat oletukset uusien työntekijöiden assimilatiosta. Tästä huolimatta aiemmat tutkimukset assimilatiosta virtuaalisessa kontekstissa eivät ole kattavia. Erityisesti sitä, miten uuden, hajautetun toimintapaikan uudet työntekijät sopeutuvat olemassa olevaan R&D osastoon, jonka toiminta on samanaikaisesti muuttunut paikallisesta globaaliin, ei ole aiemmin tutkittu.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on kattaa mainitut tutkimusaukot ja tutkia mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat uusien työntekijöiden assimilatioon vastikään hajautetussa ohjelmistokehitys projektissa, jonka muut työntekijät ovat kaukana ja tottuneet työskentelemään paikallisesti. Tutkimus on toteutettu yksittäisenä tapaustutkimuksena suomalaisessa ohjelmistoyrityksessä, joka on vastikään perustanut uuteen maahan R&D osastolleen uuden toimiston pystyäkseen palkkaamaan lisää ohjelmistokehittäjiä. Tutkimusaineisto on kerätty kenttähavaintojen ja puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen avulla. Tavoitteena on ollut kerätä molemmilta puolilta työntekijöiden ensikokemuksia ja –vaikutelmia tutkittavasta aiheesta. 19 uutta työntekijää ja 10 kokeneempaa sisäpiiriläistä, joilla on keskeinen rooli yrityksen R&D projektissa, tai joilla on muuten keskeinen rooli sopeuttamisprosessissa, on haastateltu. Tutkimusaineisto on tämän jälkeen analysoitu Gioia-metodin mukaisesti.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että uusien työntekijöiden assimilatio tapahtuu virtuaalisessa kontekstissa sekä kasvotusten että virtuaalisten aktiviteettien kautta. Kasvotusten tapahtuvat aktiviteetit ovat ratkaisevia, sillä uudet työntekijät eivät pysty saamaan tarpeeksi tietoa virtuaalisten kanavien kautta. Tämän lisäksi assimilatiokuilu, joka on tutkimuksen löytämä uusi ilmiö, voi syntyä uusien ja kokeneempien työntekijöiden vastakkaisten käsitysten perusteella. Tämä voi aiheuttaa ongelmia, vaikeuttaa uusien työntekijöiden assimilatiota ja lisätä työntekijöiden haluja vaihtaa työpaikkaa.

---

**Avainsanat** uusien työntekijöiden sopeutuminen, uusien työntekijöiden assimilatio, assimilatiokuilu, sosiaalistamistaktikat, kasvokkain tapahtuvat aktiviteetit, virtuaaliset aktiviteetit, ohjelmistoyritys, hajautettu projekti

---

## Acknowledgements

My thesis topic is inspired by my minor, Entrepreneurial Leadership, as I wanted to find a topic that would be human-centric but still related to my major. I never would have thought that this leads me here and I am forever grateful for all who have participated and supported me during this journey! However, there are people who I want to especially point out:

I would like to start by thanking my family for all the love and support they have given me. I would like to thank my little sister for keeping me on my feet and taking care of my physical health. It is a huge benefit to have a sport enthusiast in the family! In addition, I want to thank my cousins for brainstorming both bachelor's and master's thesis topics with me to clear my thoughts and to find my own path. I would also like to thank my "big sister" for acting as an example, supporting and encouraging me, and for organizing the thesis boot camp where the work really started.

I would also like to thank my friends for not asking about my thesis all the time. I also appreciate your patience and understanding when I had to cancel our plans. I promise to be more present from now on!

To my awesome supervisor: I am forever grateful for this project opportunity! Thank you for having me as your research assistant, giving me the opportunity to have a unique thesis experience with a real research trip abroad, and sharing the thesis & cocktails moments with me. Your continuous support, encouragement and critical questions have pushed me forward and I have learned a lot. I will cherish all the memories and experiences I have gained during this project, and I cannot wait for our future adventures!

Last but not least, I would like to thank my beloved husband. Your unconditional love has carried me through the thick and thin. Thank you for understanding my long hours at the library, while still cheering me forward. Thank you for being my rock!

One wise professor once said that thesis is a project – not a process – with a clear start and a clear end. My thesis project started in 2017 and finally, it has come to an end.

Helsinki, 16.2.2018

*Jessica Luostarinen*

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iii
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Motivation .....	2
1.3 Purpose of the study and research questions .....	3
1.4 Structure of the study .....	4
<b>2 Literature review .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Defining the concepts.....	5
2.2 Assimilation process .....	7
2.2.1 Stage 1: Anticipatory stage – Getting in.....	8
2.2.2 Stage 2: Entry stage – Breaking in .....	9
2.2.3 Stage 3: Metamorphosis stage – Settling in.....	11
2.3 Socialization context – organizations & socialization tactics .....	11
2.3.1 Socialization tactics & newcomer experiences .....	12
2.3.2 Institutionalized vs. Individualized tactics .....	14
2.3.3 Collective & formal tactics vs. Individual & informal tactics .....	15
2.3.4 Sequential & fixed tactics vs. Random & variable tactics.....	16
2.3.5 Serial & investiture tactics vs. Disjunctive & divestiture tactics.....	17
2.4 Person-organization (P-O) fit .....	18
2.5 Socialization content – newcomers & information .....	20
2.5.1 Content areas .....	20
2.5.2 Types of information .....	23
2.5.3 Information-seeking tactics .....	24
2.5.4 Factors influencing information-seeking.....	29
2.6 Technology-mediated assimilation .....	30
2.6.1 Newcomer assimilation in a virtual context .....	30
2.6.2 Information seeking in a virtual context.....	33
2.7 Successful assimilation .....	36
2.8 Studying newcomer assimilation in this thesis .....	38
<b>3 Research methodology .....</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1 Research design.....	39
3.2 Case company.....	41
3.3 Data collection .....	42
3.3.1 Data collection procedure.....	42
3.3.2 Research interviews.....	44
3.4 Data analysis process .....	46
3.5 Research quality.....	48
<b>4 Findings .....</b>	<b>50</b>

<b>4.1</b>	<b>From local to global R&amp;D .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Fit – what the different parties were looking for .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Orientation program &amp; newcomer experiences.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Face-to-face activities .....</b>	<b>58</b>
4.4.1	Site visits .....	58
4.4.2	Face-to-face discussions.....	60
4.4.3	Information-seeking .....	61
4.4.4	Mentoring.....	62
4.4.5	Social activities.....	63
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Virtual activities.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>4.6</b>	<b>Outcomes of assimilation.....</b>	<b>67</b>
4.6.1	Assimilation timeline.....	67
4.6.2	Understanding the company values.....	68
4.6.3	Assimilation gap 1 – Taking ownership.....	70
4.6.4	Assimilation gap 2 – Ways of working .....	72
4.6.5	Assimilation success.....	74
<b>5</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Socialization tactics.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Face-to-face &amp; virtual activities.....</b>	<b>80</b>
5.2.1	Information seeking in co-located and virtual contexts.....	80
5.2.2	Information seeking through virtual channels .....	82
5.2.3	Formal and informal mentoring.....	84
5.2.4	Social activities.....	85
5.2.5	The importance of site visits in virtual environment.....	85
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Analyzing the assimilation success .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Research summary .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Implications for practice .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Limitations and suggestions for futures research .....</b>	<b>91</b>
	<b>References.....</b>	<b>93</b>
	<b>Appendix A: Interview structure for newcomers .....</b>	<b>101</b>
	<b>Appendix B: Interview structure for additional interviews .....</b>	<b>103</b>
	<b>Appendix C: Interview structure for organizational insiders .....</b>	<b>104</b>
	<b>Appendix D: A list of codes.....</b>	<b>105</b>
	<b>Appendix E: A list of the whole data structure .....</b>	<b>106</b>

**List of Tables**

Table 1: How the different terms are used in this thesis ..... 5

Table 2: Classification of socialization tactics ..... 13

Table 3: Assimilation content areas..... 21

Table 4: Information seeking tactics ..... 26



**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Assimilation process as a stage model. .... 8

Figure 2. Antecedents and outcomes of successful newcomer assimilation. .... 36

Figure 3. Assimilation rates..... 38

Figure 4: Summary of collected data and its collection timeline. .... 43

Figure 5. An example of data structure. .... 47

Figure 6. Assimilation gap 1 – Taking ownership. .... 71

Figure 7. Assimilation gap 2 – Ways of working..... 73

# 1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the topic of this master's thesis and the motivation behind this study. The research questions and the purpose of this study are also introduced in this section together with the structure of the thesis.

## 1.1 Background

In the U.S., at least 3% of their labor force are routinely considered as new hires on monthly basis (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Furthermore, up to 25% of the U.S. workers are at any point during their tenure experiencing an assimilation process (Rollag, Parise & Cross, 2005), i.e. the process through which new hires get integrated into their role and organization (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein & Gardner, 1994). Interestingly, as summarized by Allen (2006), the willingness to leave the company is often highest among newcomers. Hence, as successful assimilation is found to have a significant impact on job performance and satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to stay, successful organizational assimilation is important for both organizations and their new employees (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo & Tucker, 2007).

Previously, most of the assimilation literature has focused mostly on how individuals are assimilated into co-located and established teams, organizations and projects. However, as organizations have become more global and technologies more advanced, geographically distributed work setting has become a normal way of working (Goldman & Shapiro, 2012). In this setting, employees from different locations are collaborating together over distance and at least partly through technology (Fulk & DeSanctis, 1995; Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004). Hence, geographically distributed teams and projects that get accomplished through using technologies are constantly more common for organizations (Ahuja & Carley, 1999).

Therefore, as the work environment has changed from local to more global and the use of advanced technologies has increased, it is evitable that the previous point-of-view of assimilation might not be viable any longer. This has spurred an interest among researchers to investigate the assimilation process of new hires into the virtual context. Even though the newcomers already face uncertainty and reality shock in co-located settings (see e.g. Reichers, 1987; Jablin, 2001), it is likely that these feelings are inflated in a virtual context, and newcomers might need to be more proactive in a dispersed work setting than in co-located one (see e.g. Cascio, 2000; Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). The use of technology allows

newcomers to access wider group of organizational insiders and to acquire information from them easily despite of their work location (Ahuja & Carley, 1999). However, although newcomers assimilate through the use of technology in a virtual setting, it might be important to combine virtual means of communication with face-to-face interactions, in order for virtual newcomers to assimilate successfully into the organization (Oshri, Kotlarsky & Willcocks, 2007). This suggests that the importance of face-to-face means of communication might not disappear in this virtual context, and it might not be any less important than in the traditional co-located environment.

## 1.2 Motivation

With the help of technology, organizations can become more distributed and global to be able to cope in the fast-moving business environments. In addition, this enables them to find new employee markets when enough skillful employees cannot be found from their home countries. For example, when talking about Finland and software industry, there has been lot of discussions on employees' know-how and the difficulties in finding skillful employees. In software industry, there has been identified a job seeker-provider gap as for most – if not for all – software programmers or developers there should be jobs open, but the employers' needs and expectations are somewhat different than employees' existing know-how. Hence, in Finland, the software industry is currently suffering from a labor shortage. (Metsä-Tokila, 2017)

This opens up an avenue for finding relevant empirical sites for investigating how newcomers assimilate into a newly established globally distributed software R&D department. The case company of this study established a new distant site in 2017 to be able to hire more skillful software developers, which could not be found at the speed needed in Finland. This decision enabled them to keep up with their growth strategy as well as cope with the market pressures. Previously, the case company's software R&D department was co-located in one office in Finland but since the new distant office was established, the department and its project have recently distributed into two geographically distant locations.

Though a lot of existing research literature related to newcomer assimilation is available, previous research has mostly studied co-located and existing projects, teams and organizations. Only in recent decades has assimilation to a virtual setting gained more interest. However, even most of these newest researches focus on existing structures, teams and projects (see e.g. Crowston, Howison, Masango & Eseryel, 2007; Oshri, et al., 2007).

However, even most of these newest recent researches also focus on existing structures, teams and projects. Hence, there is a need to study newcomer assimilation into a newly distributed context with a new distant office and employees. This allows to study newcomer assimilation into a newly distributed R&D project, with no existing practices at the site in which the newcomers are expected to work.

From a practitioner point of view, there is also a need to identify the best practices for companies to be utilized when they consider establishing a new distant site with totally new employees, to ensure successful assimilation. Hence, this study could provide support for organizations searching for skillful employees since, instead of fighting with competitors about the minimal resources available, companies could establish another function to location where skillful employees are available – oftentimes at a lower pay rate, which may save the company costs. Hiring internal employees could be an alternative for the use of outsourcing and contractor companies.

### 1.3 Purpose of the study and research questions

Building on the above, there is a lack of research in the context of how newcomers assimilate into a totally new team where all employees are newcomers – while having to adapt practices of the headquarter located at a distant site. In addition, there is lack of research relating to newcomer assimilation when the establishment of a new global R&D unit has changed their work from local to global, i.e. the project had newly become distributed. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to begin bridge these gaps in research by finding the key factors affecting newcomers' assimilation in a newly distributed project, when all the employees in the new locations are newcomers. The research questions are as follows:

**RQ1:** What factors affect the ways newcomers assimilate into common work practices of a distant site in a recently established globally distributed project?

**RQ2:** How does socialization tactics as well as face-to-face and virtual activities affect this assimilation?

The research is conducted on a software R&D department of a software development company that established a new distant office to ease their difficulties in searching skillful software developers. The objective of this study is to collect and analyze both newcomers and insiders' first-hand experiences regarding the new distant team, focusing more on the anticipatory and entry stages of assimilation. During the former stage, all assimilation activities occur prior a newcomer enters an organization (Myers & Oetzel, 2003), while in

the latter, the newcomer has joined his or her new organization and started the orientation and training which aim to integrate the newcomer into the organization and its culture (Jablin, 1987). This is done through field observations and semi-structured interviews with 19 newcomers and 10 organizational insiders. This study was conducted in a collaboration with a wider research project at Aalto University. It is a part of an ongoing research program named MatchDesign, funded by Tekes.

## **1.4 Structure of the study**

This thesis is organized as follows. First, Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background for this study. The literature review concentrates on providing an overview of newcomer assimilation and the factors which have been found to affect its success. Followed by Chapter 3 the research methodology is described in detail. The research design, data collection and analysis processes are introduced together with an introduction of the case company. Thereafter, Chapter 4 presents the research findings in more detail, while Chapter 5 presents reflections and comparisons between the findings of this study and the theories introduced in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the research and provides suggestions for practice as well as for future research.

## 2 Literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the existing literature relating to newcomer assimilation. First, the key concepts are defined. Then, the factors that are likely to affect newcomers' assimilation and their experiences are discussed. These factors include the assimilation process and its different phases, followed by the different activities taking place during the process, both from the newcomer's and the organization's perspectives. Moreover, the role of technology in newcomer assimilation is also described. The chapter ends with a discussion of assimilation success.

### 2.1 Defining the concepts

Researchers have defined assimilation differently depending on the point-of-view taken. For example, if the research has studied assimilation as a stage process, assimilation has been defined as a process (see e.g. Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1987), while sometimes, newcomer assimilation has been viewed as an antecedent for positive outcomes (see e.g. Jablin, 2001; Bauer et al., 2007). Furthermore, depending on the researchers, terms like newcomer assimilation, organizational assimilation, socialization and organizational socialization are used when studying newcomers' integration and adjustment into an organization. The different definitions presented below act as antecedents for the ways the different terms, i.e. newcomer assimilation and socialization are used in this. The definitions of this study are presented in Table 1:

*Table 1: How the different terms are used in this thesis*

Term	How the term is used
<b>Newcomer assimilation</b>	overall process through which a newcomer integrates into a company by being proactive, seeking help, learning, and getting to know people; incl. socialization activities provided by the company
<b>Organizational assimilation</b>	Same as newcomer assimilation
<b>Socialization</b>	tactics used by an organization to integrate the newcomers (incl. orientation period organized by the company and its content); i.e. newcomers cannot influence this themselves
<b>Organizational socialization</b>	Same as socialization

Van Maanen (1978) has stated that “organizational socialization or people processing refers to the manner in which the experiences of people learning the ropes of a new organizational position, status, or role are structured for them by others within the

organization” (p. 19). This definition includes assimilation outcomes and the manners in which others are socializing newcomers. On the other hand, defined by Chao et al. (1994) from newcomers’ perspective, organizational socialization concerns newcomers’ learning and the process through which newcomers adjust to a specific organizational role. It is the primary process through which newcomers adapt to new work and organizations.

Through socialization, newcomers adopt the proper attitudes, behaviors and knowledge needed to become an organizational member (Ritti & Funkhouser, 1987; Cable & Parsons, 2001). In addition, the newcomers learn the organization-specific practices and build relationships with other organizational members (Hart, 2012). Hence, socialization is vital for organizations to ensure the continuity of common values and norms.

Organizational assimilation can also be defined as a process, which are followed by the individuals when they get integrated into the organization (Jablin, 1987). Based on Flanagin and Waldeck (2004), organizational assimilation involves all the activities from being interviewed for a position to being settled into the organization and the new role. Hence, through the assimilation process, nonperforming newcomers acquire information needed to transform themselves into integrated and contributing organizational members (Comer, 1991).

In addition, other researchers have used the process view to illustrate how newcomers’ role change after joining a new organization. Through organizational assimilation process, newcomers adapt to the organization, and go from being outsiders to organizational insiders (Louis, 1980b; Bauer & Green, 1994). According to Louis (1980b), newcomers become insiders as they gain broad responsibilities, work independently and provide information and help to others. Hence, through organizational assimilation, one aims to become a contributing member of the organization, which is the result of interactions among organizational members (Gailliard, Myers & Seibold, 2010). Based on Myers and Oetzel (2003: 438) “organizational assimilation describes the interactive mutual acceptance of newcomers into organizational settings”, and both it involved both organizations and newcomers.

Furthermore, it is expected that when an employee’s job or employer changes, it can create needs to learn new skills and behaviors or require resocialization (i.e. retraining). Every role or job change requires organizational socialization, so newcomers are able to adjust and integrate into the new role and setting. (Louis, 1980a; 1980b) According to Schein (1971), whenever individuals move along three different organizational dimensions, role changes are created resulting in new needs for learning. The three different organization

dimensions are functional, hierarchical and organizational dimensions. When an employee moves along the functional dimension, he or she moves within different operational areas such as production and finance, for example. When changes arise from moving along the hierarchical dimension, there has been changes in the employee's rank or level of power. When individuals move across organizational boundaries, i.e. become newcomers in a new organization, a lot of learning and changes are required as individuals enters a new organization, which may be built up by completely different norms. When newcomers leave their membership in one organization and join another one, they set aside parts of their old identities to gain new ones and discard familiar roles in order to learn and adopt new ones, newcomers must cope with the uncertainty followed by their entry to new organizations (Miller & Jablin, 1991). In sum, Chao et al. (1994) found when major job and/or organizational changes occur, newcomers are likely to go through an assimilation process.

However, no matter what the focus is or how the concept is defined, organizational assimilation is related to many aspects of organizational life (Gailliard et al., 2010). Based on the above, it is evident that the use of different terms differs from researcher to researcher. However, in this thesis, the ways these terms are used are presented in Table 1. In sum, newcomer assimilation and organizational assimilation are used interchangeably to describe the overall process, which newcomers go through to be integrated into a newly entered organization. It includes both newcomers' own actions as well as organizations' socialization tactics, which are aimed to support newcomers' successful assimilation. Socialization, in this study, refers to those tactics used by organizations to support newcomers' assimilation.

## **2.2 Assimilation process**

According to Jablin (1987: 717), "people exit jobs and organizations just as frequently as they enter them", forcing them to "adapt, cope, learn, assimilate, and re-assimilate" (Waldeck, Seibold & Flanagin, 2004: 163). Hence, as newcomers come and go, and organizational roles to be filled varies, the optimal assimilation process needs to address this frequency and diversity (Cooper-Thomas, Anderson & Cash, 2012). Thus, through this process, newcomers' abilities to master the necessary skills and knowledge, and abilities to identify what needs to be learned can be affected, after which newcomers are expected to start performing their tasks effectively (Chao et al., 1994; Ashforth & Saks, 1996). Furthermore, activities in one stage have an influence on outcomes at later stages (Bauer & Green, 1994).



Both Bauer and Green (1994) and Waldeck et al. (2004) have suggested that the process of assimilation is an ongoing, career-long process addressing occurred uncertainty in any phase of employee's tenure. In contrast, when using the stage model (see Figure 1; Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 2001) point-of-view, newcomer assimilation process is defined to consist of at least three stages: anticipatory stage, entry stage, and metamorphosis stage. The first stage, the anticipatory stage, include all the activities occurring prior to entry as the newcomer is trying to obtain the position, while in the second stage, the entry stage, the newcomer has entered the new organization and started the orientation to become a full member of the organization. The third stage, the metamorphosis stage, is the long-term view of successful assimilation as the newcomer has settled in and become a full member of the organization. Furthermore, based on this view, assimilation may begin even before anticipatory stage (see Figure 1) as early as in the childhood when one observes his or her parents to work and seek a position. On the other hand, some activities may continue even after the organizational exit, as the newcomer is required to forget his or her organizational identity to be able to adopt a new one in a new organization. (Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Jablin, 2001; Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Bauer & Green, 1994)

Overall, the different activities taking place throughout the assimilation process can be seen as opportunities for newcomers to learn about their new organization, job and co-workers. In addition, newcomers are expected to engage in different socialization activities including formal and informal socialization activities with the organizational insiders. Furthermore, activities in one stage have an influence on outcomes at later stages. (Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Jablin, 2001; Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Bauer & Green, 1994)



Figure 1. Assimilation process as a stage model.

### 2.2.1 Stage 1: Anticipatory stage – Getting in

The main activities during the anticipatory stage include forming expectations about the work (i.e. receiving information), sharing information when trying to obtain the position, process information to determine if the job fits, and making decisions about the employment (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Feldman, 1976). In this stage, information sources include family and friends, educational institutions, experiences gained from part-time employment, and media. In addition, the initial job interview can be seen as an opportunity for information

seeking. (Jablin, 1987) As summarized by Bauer and Green (1994), the experiences prior to entry, are important part of newcomers' assimilation process; as prior learning about the organization and the experiences needed for the task have been shown to relate to newcomer assimilation positively.

### 2.2.2 Stage 2: Entry stage – Breaking in

The second stage is called accommodation, entry or encounter stage depending on the researcher in question. In this thesis, entry stage is being used when discussing about activities and experiences when a person joins a new organization.

During the entry stage, the newcomer sees what the organization is actually like and tries to become an active member of it. Here, communication is an important facilitator of learning. (Jablin, 1987) The main activities for newcomers here are; learning new tasks, clarifying their own roles in the organization, evaluating their own progress in the organization, and establishing new relationships with coworkers. (Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 2001) During this stage, newcomers establish a situational identity for themselves, and make sense of events, practices and activities they observe when working in their new organization (Reichers, 1987; Louis, 1980b).

Furthermore, information acquired during the entry stage of assimilation helps newcomers to manage the uncertainty and the reality shock they might experience since people usually do not like uncertainty, i.e. they want to know in advance, what is going to happen and how to behave (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Ritti & Funkhouser, 1987). Newcomers, who do not seek information as consciously and who do not utilize the different information seeking tactics, may fail to reduce uncertainty and may experience higher levels of role ambiguity (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Furthermore, it is likely that newcomers, who acquire more knowledge of their organizations through various socialization activities and/or information seeking, are more integrated into the organizations and display more positive behaviors. For example, newcomers' agreement with the organizational values and the importance of their own work values, i.e. the fit between their own values and organizational values (work value congruence), define the assimilation outcomes to organizational values and goals. With low work value congruence and a strong belief in their own values, newcomers may engage in harmful behaviors. Hence, newcomers who lack knowledge of organizational goals and values are more likely to change jobs and/or organizations than those who have high knowledge of the goals and values. (Kraimer, 1997) In addition,

Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999) found training to be highly associated with learning to know the organizational culture and accepting it.

Meaning and understanding are socially constructed, i.e. newcomers establish them through interactions with other organizational members (Reichers, 1987). During entry, newcomers are usually buried under a variety of mediated and non-mediated forms of communication from management targeted to all organizational newcomers. Furthermore, interactions with supervisors are likely to focus on newcomers' tasks and performance, providing feedback about newcomers' expected performance. Newcomers' relationship with their supervisors is a crucial factor defining the nature of newcomers' encounter experiences. (Jablin, 1987) Therefore, supervisors play an important role during the entry stage.

According to Jablin (1987), it appears, however, that newcomers are more willingly to receive and acquire information from their co-workers than from their supervisors. Furthermore, Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) found that those newcomers who were mentored by an experienced organizational insider were able to learn more about their organization than those who were non-mentored. This is also supported by Cable and Parsons (2001), who found evidence for the importance of newcomers engaging in social interactions with organizational insiders to support learning and adoption of common values. Therefore, it is likely that those newcomers engaging more in work-related activities experience greater level of accommodation as they have more opportunities to socialize with other organizational members (Bauer & Green, 1994).

Information acquired and received from other organizational insiders is intended to clarify newcomers' roles, familiarize newcomers with the organizational practices, to help newcomers to integrate into their new work groups, and to support newcomers to define their new self-image (Jablin, 1987). Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999) found that experienced co-workers might have the most significant role in facilitating effective socialization. Experienced co-workers are an important information source for newcomers, as they possess lots of information related to the job and the organization's norms and culture. They were also found to have a significant effect on newcomers' task mastery, their successful performance within the team, their knowledge of organizational culture, and role clarity. Hence, Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999) suggest, based on their results, that organizations should utilize their insiders in newcomer socialization either formally (e.g. mentoring programs) or informally since they can contribute positively to effective assimilation and long-term career success.

However, from the work group and organization's point-of-view, newcomer assimilation may – in addition to providing potential benefits –bring some negative consequences as well. The integration of newcomers into an organization and work group can strengthen the morale of those groups, as well as, provide opportunities to redesign work and reallocate important tasks within the groups. The negative consequences originate from problems faced by organizational members socializing the newcomers. For example, if one member is solely responsible of socializing newcomers, less time is given to other work duties and may cause delays in completing tasks. In addition, if the socialization of newcomers leads to ineffective socialization, the socializing members may lose face among other members. (Feldman, 1994)

### 2.2.3 Stage 3: Metamorphosis stage – Settling in

Metamorphosis stage can also be called the role management stage. During this stage, newcomers are trying to balance the different demands arising from their own work group and other groups demanding their attention. The main conflicts here occur between work life and home (e.g. schedules), and between their own work groups and other groups in the organization (e.g. priorities assigned to a certain task). (Myers & Oetzel, 2003; Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 2001)

While during the entry stage, the management communication served as an orientation facilitator, here the communication continues to be one-way from its nature, i.e. coming mostly from the organizational insiders, aiming to reinforce a sense of organizational identification and commitment. As newcomers become more aware of their work environments, it is likely that they will share information and feedback more and more to their co-workers rather than just seek information from them. (Jablin, 1987)

It is worth noting that in this study, metamorphosis stage is excluded from the research scope as the newcomers have only entered the case company and long-term follow-up is not possible due to the time-span of this thesis.

## 2.3 Socialization context – organizations & socialization tactics

As summarized by Hart and Miller (2005), organizations shape newcomers' socialization contexts, i.e. the nature of newcomers' experiences by using socialization tactics, while socialization content, i.e. information acquired and received supports newcomers to make sense of their experiences affected by the socialization tactics. In this section, the

socialization context, i.e. the organization's point-of-view is discussed, while the content of assimilation, i.e. the newcomers' point-of-view is discussed later on in.

Newcomers' most important and pressing task as they enter a new organization is to try to understand the different activities they observe (Van Maanen, 1978). Socialization context refers to the ways an organization can support and affect its newcomers' assimilation. Through the socialization context, newcomers receive messages about how to perform tasks successfully, who can help them, terminology, and organizational goals and values, which all provide clarity about what is expected from newcomers (Hart & Miller, 2005). As described by Hart and Miller (2005), organizations structure and shape the socialization context to newcomers through the use of socialization tactics.

### 2.3.1 Socialization tactics & newcomer experiences

As summarized by Meyer and Allen (1988), the first months, after a newcomer has entered the organization, are identified as crucial for the development of work attitudes as newcomers' experiences are shaping their commitment to their new organizations. However, in reality, early experiences do not often meet the expectations of newcomers, causing a decline in their job satisfaction and organizational commitment as well as an increase in turnovers in the early stages of employment. Newcomers who are joining organizations may experience a reality shock when their expectations of how other members of the organization interpret and react to their actions and performance do not measure up with how the organizational insiders are behaving in reality. Therefore, newcomers may have to re-evaluate their expectations and seek information about why others are behaving the way they do to reduce their feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. (Jones, 1986) Furthermore, new situation may also require newcomers to reassess – or even alter – their own goals, i.e. the goals they wish to achieve while working in the new organization. They also might need to reassess their organizational identity, which they try to live up and maintain in front of other organizational members. Sometimes the changes may be dramatically, while other times, they may be only minor and insignificant. However, these changes may result in a reality shock when newcomers' prior understanding of their new role changes after they joined the organization. (Van Maanen, 1978)

Organizations can influence newcomers' responses to their roles by using different socialization tactics that controls and shapes the information newcomers receive. By giving or withholding information, organizations can encourage and motivate newcomers to understand and react to different situations in a predictable manner. (Jones, 1986) This is

also supported by Allen (2006) who suggested that organizations could influence newcomers' embeddedness in their organization with socialization tactics. However, most of organizational newcomers have prior work experience, and experienced newcomers are usually hired for their existing expertise. Socialization tactics might be less effective for those newcomers compared to graduate newcomers, hence, experienced newcomers are more likely to rely on their own capabilities to become socialized. (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012) Nonetheless, according to Van Maanen (1978), socialization strategies are most obvious when a person joins a new organization or is changing his or her work within an organization.

Jones (1986) has categorized the different socialization tactics (see Table 2) into two different collective groups; individualized socialization tactics and institutionalized socialization tactics. Individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive and divestiture tactics belong under individualized socialization tactics, while the collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial and investiture tactics belong under institutionalized socialization tactics. However, it is important to notice that these tactics are not mutually exclusive, instead they are usually combined together (Van Maanen, 1978). Hence, organizations should tailor newcomers' socialization experiences to create a desired commitment and role orientation. The latter refers to ways one performs his or her roles and adjusts to task requirements. (Jones, 1986) For example, if an organization desires an employee to become committed and willing to innovate, but at the same time, to minimize the effect of newcomer's prior characteristics and to encourage newcomer to establish his or her own strategies for the new role, investiture and disjunctive tactics might be the most efficient ones (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Furthermore, if an organization aims to gain similarity in thinking and actions, a combination of formal, serial and divestiture tactics could be the best effective ones. On the other hand, if dissimilarity were valued, informal, disjunctive and investiture tactics would be preferable. (Van Maanen, 1978)

*Table 2: Classification of socialization tactics*

SOCIALIZATION TACTICS	Institutionalized	Individualized
<b>Context</b>	Collective	Individual
	Formal	Informal
<b>Content</b>	Sequential	Random
	Fixed	Variable
<b>Social aspects</b>	Serial	Disjunctive
	Investiture	Divestiture

### 2.3.2 Institutionalized vs. Individualized tactics

Institutionalized tactics is build up as a common learning experience, thus, a collective process for all newcomers. The process is formal since it occurs outside of the work setting providing explicit and unambiguous structure of the sequence of different activities (sequential tactics) and timelines (fixed tactics). Role models (serial tactics) and social support (investiture tactics) from other organizational members support and confirm newcomers' identities. In contrast, individualized socialization is build up as a unique learning experience, an individual process for each newcomer. The process is informal since the learning takes place on-the-job providing only little information about the sequences of different activities (random tactics) or timelines (variable tactics). This process requires newcomers to develop their own roles (disjunctive tactics) as role models might not exist in the organization, while still expecting newcomers to change their existing identities (divestiture tactics). (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

Institutionalized tactics depict structured programs, reducing ambiguity and encouraging newcomers to adopt common norms and accept the status quo, while individualized tactics lack visible structure, thus, creating ambiguity and encouraging newcomers to question the organization's status quo and develop their own responses to different situations (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). Newcomers gaining more institutionalized socialization tactics (than individualized) have been found to experience increased job satisfaction and commitment, and lower intention to quit (Jones, 1986). Similarly, according to Saks, Uggerslev and Fassina (2007), institutionalized tactics are likely to affect positively newcomers' perceptions of fit and organizational commitment as well as job satisfaction and performance. Furthermore, a relationship between institutionalized tactics and reduction of uncertainty and anxiety has been found (Gruman & Saks, 2011), which suggests that these tactics are likely to affect newcomers' integration into organizations more, and consequently, increase their satisfaction. Especially, when newcomer's self-efficacy is low, i.e. low expectations on own abilities to perform successfully in new situations, institutionalized tactics can be the most successful ones. This suggests that newcomers might be willing to accept the organizational insiders' existing definitions of different situations as they are rather than trying to assess these themselves. (Jones, 1986; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Allen & Meyer, 1990)

Furthermore, institutionalized tactics is negatively related to role innovation, ambiguity and conflict, stress, and intentions to quit, and positively to custodial orientation.

In other words, institutionalized tactics supports the continuum of established roles and procedures, while individualized tactics encourage newcomers to innovatively define and enact their roles. It seems likely that newcomers' attempts to change their organizational roles are less likely to succeed if the organization is using institutionalized tactics since they represent relatively elaborate and formalized programs. In contrast, with individualized tactics it is easier for the newcomers to change their roles since these tactics lack structure. (Jones, 1986; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Allen & Meyer, 1990)

In sum, socialization requires newcomers to learn an organization's culture and its values. Therefore, it is likely that the more institutionalized the socialization experience is, the more coherent picture will be provided of what the organization represents and how members should interpret organizational events. As the organizational status quo and the current roles base on existing organizational culture, values and goals, it is likely that these are passed on to newcomers through institutionalized tactics. However, as newcomers' needs are likely to vary over time, newcomers may become less receptive to institutionalized tactics and more receptive to other impetus in their work environments. (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Kraimer 1997)

### 2.3.3 Collective & formal tactics vs. Individual & informal tactics

The tactics in the first two rows of Table 2, collective and formal (Institutionalized), as well as individual and informal (Individualized), vary in terms of how organizations provide information to newcomers (Jones, 1986). In general, individual tactics are seen as expensive and time consuming, while collective tactics are seen as easy and efficient for organizations to perform (Van Maanen, 1978).

Collective tactics means that all newcomers go through a common learning program with established and standardized responses to well-known situations. With collective tactics, all newcomers are hence grouped together for an identical socialization process, creating nearly always an experience among newcomers to be "in-the-same-boat", to share collective consciousness and homogeneous thinking. In addition, the newcomers are able to engage in social interactions with other newcomers, highlighting the importance of the social context in assimilation. In contrast, individual tactics provide each newcomer a unique learning experience providing an opportunity to develop personal responses, which results in less homogeneous thinking. (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen, 1978; Allen, 2006)

Formal tactics usually refers to the degree to which the socialization activities are separated from the ongoing work context. The more formal the process is, the more



newcomers are isolated and differentiated from other organizational members. This forces newcomers to learn and adopt all information presented to them since newcomers cannot know what is relevant for their work that they will start doing, which can create more stress. (Van Maanen, 1978) A formal process may include and even require formal in-class courses and/or self-studying (Black & Ashford, 1995). Opposite to formal tactics are informal tactics. With no formal structure in informal tactics, the organization cannot ensure that the newcomer learns all the necessary skills and information needed to perform his or her new tasks nor that the newcomer learns the common norms and values of the organization. (Van Maanen, 1978)

In general, the formal process is only the first part of socialization, followed by informal process during the second part. Usually, formal tactics prepare a newcomer for a particular status in the organization, while informal tactics prepare a newcomer to perform specific work tasks. (Van Maanen, 1978) When formal tactics is coupled with collective practices, newcomers accept standardized responses and common norms, values and practices. With informal tactics, newcomers join work groups from the beginning and learning takes place on the job, and when these are coupled with individual tactics, newcomers can form their own responses to different situations. (Jones, 1986; Cable & Parsons, 2001)

#### 2.3.4 Sequential & fixed tactics vs. Random & variable tactics

The tactics in the next two rows of Table 2, sequential and formal (Institutionalized), as well as random and variable (Individualized), deal with the content of the information that newcomers receive. Within institutionalized tactics, sequential tactics provide newcomers detailed information about the sequences of activities they will go through, while fixed tactics provide them precise knowledge of the socialization process' timeline. Fixed process provides precise knowledge of the time each stage requires to be completed, i.e. fixed process is considered to be normal progress during socialization. When newcomers know how they are expected to behave to receive rewards and recognition, they are more likely to behave in the prescribed ways. However, a set schedule may cause newcomers to feel pressured or being pushed before they are ready to move on to the next stage. (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen, 1978; Cable & Parsons, 2001)

Within individualized tactics, in turn, there are random and variable tactics that have no clear structure or schedule. Fixed and variable socialization processes differ from each other in terms of the information and certainty newcomers have regarding their progress

schedule. While fixed process provides precise information, variable process does not give any prior information for newcomers of their progress schedule, leaving them seeking information alone. Variable tactics provide only estimation of when they might reach a certain stage of the socialization process, and if the process is random, the sequence of the various stages is unknown. Hence, variable tactics may cause stress and anxiety for newcomers since they are left uncertain and cannot judge if they are on the right track moving forward. (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen, 1978) Furthermore, Black and Ashford (1995) found a significant impact of fixed-variable tactics on job change. As fixed tactics provide set timetables, it can discourage newcomers to try to change their jobs, while variable tactics provide no clear structures, which may encourage newcomers to try to change their jobs. Furthermore, Allen (2006) found that fixed, collective and investiture tactics, which are discussed below, relate positively to successful newcomer assimilation.

#### 2.3.5 Serial & investiture tactics vs. Disjunctive & divestiture tactics

The tactics in the last two rows of Table 2, serial and investiture (Institutionalized), as well as disjunctive and divestiture (Individualized), reflect social aspects of the socialization process. In sum, when organizations use serial tactics, the more experienced members act as mentors for newcomers, but with disjunctive tactics, newcomers are expected to develop their own definitions of different situations without the help of experienced colleagues. (Jones, 1986; Cable & Parsons, 2001) Furthermore, the last set of tactics – investiture versus divestiture – concerns the level of positive or negative social support newcomers receive from the more experienced members (Jones, 1986).

Serial tactics guarantee that an organization's status quo remains unchanged when experienced members train newcomers who are about to enter similar roles in the organization. Serial processes unlikely create innovation, but continuity will be maintained. In other words, serial tactics provide newcomers established guidelines to make sense of their new organization. In contrast, disjunctive tactics can be used when a newcomer does not have any predecessors available. However, disjunctive tactics may cause stress and confusion when few or none experienced members are around to train and support newcomers. (Van Maanen, 1978)

Investiture tactics maintain and confirm the viability and usefulness of the individual characteristics the newcomer possesses prior to his or her entry to an organization. In other words, organizations aim to communicate that the knowledge and skills newcomers already have are appropriate for their new jobs. By their nature, investiture tactics emphasizes

newcomers existing knowledge and skills, hence, newcomers do not need to change since they already possess all the expected characteristics the organization desires. Instead, other members try to ensure that newcomers' expectations and needs are met, and that the entry is as smooth as possible. In contrast, divestiture tactics aim to deny and remove certain characteristics by encouraging newcomers to change themselves. Hence, divestiture tactics are more likely to result in similar outcomes among newcomers. With divestiture tactics, newcomers receive negative social support and communication from other organizational members until they begin to change themselves and fulfill the expectations of others. Negative social experiences may cause alienation and lead newcomers to question the organization's values. Hence, newcomers are more likely to adopt to common values when spending social time with their organizational mentors and other members of the organization. (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen, 1978; Black & Ashford, 1995) Furthermore, it appears that the social support from the organizational insiders appears to help newcomers in relationship building and to support their settling in. Therefore, as serial tactics provide the newcomers with mentors offering continuity, this relates negatively to newcomers' turnover. Hence, it appears that investiture and serial tactics affect negatively newcomers' intentions to leave their organization. (Allen, 2006)

## **2.4 Person-organization (P-O) fit**

Summarized by Cable and Parsons (2001), person-organization (P-O) fit, i.e. the fit between people and their organizations where they work, is a key to maintain a committed workforce necessary in a competitive business environment. When newcomers align their own values with organizational values during assimilation, they are more likely to become committed to the organization. On the other hand, both applicants' personal and organizations' values as well as the fit between them may affect the recruiters' recommendations and consequently organizations' hiring decisions (Cable & Judge, 1997).

Past research has found that potential newcomers try to find organizations with the same "personality" or values as they possess (Cable & Judge, 1996), and hence newcomers' assimilation is likely to be affected by their background (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Cable and Parsons (2001) remarked that newcomers' pre-entry value congruence, i.e. the fit between newcomers' own values and their perceptions of their organization's values after entry significantly predicted their subjective perceptions of their P-O fit. For example, individuals tend to seek organizations with values similar to them, which affect their interpretation of fit. The better the fit between employees and their work, the happier they are with their

current work situation. In contrast, individuals are more likely to leave if their initial values do not fit with their organization's values. (Feldman, 1976; Cable & Parsons, 2001) Furthermore, according to Black and Ashford (1995), newcomers with high need for control may seek a sense of personal control by changing their job to fit their capabilities better rather than trying to change themselves to meet the expectations and requirements of the organization. In contrast, those newcomers with high need for feedback are more likely to change themselves to meet the expectations of others rather than change their jobs (Nicholson, 1984).

The way organizations manage or fail to manage newcomers' entry and initial interactions with other members depends on the organizational culture. It is likely that newcomers report higher P-O fit with organizations that try to reduce uncertainty and anxiety during the entry phase. Cable and Parsons (2001) found that newcomers' subjective fit interpretation and changes in their values, are connected with content (sequential and fixed socialization tactics vs variable and random tactics) and social aspects (serial and investiture tactics vs disjunctive and divestiture tactics), but not with the context dimension of socialization (collective and formal tactics vs individualized and informal tactics). Furthermore, those newcomers who experienced collective and formal socialization tactics did not report higher P-O fit nor were they related to changes in newcomers' values compared to those newcomers who experienced individualized and informal tactics. On the other hand, newcomers who experienced sequential and fixed socialization tactics, i.e. they received information about sequences and timetables of the socialization process as well as career progression, reported higher P-O fit compared to those who experienced random and variable tactics. They also reported a change in their values toward their interpretation of their organization's values. Similarly, newcomers who experienced serial and investiture socialization tactics, i.e. received support from organizational insiders which helped them to build social networks and feel accepted, reported higher P-O fit and a change in their values compared to those who experienced disjunctive and divestiture tactics. (Cable & Parsons, 2001)

The foregoing indicates that the context aspects of socialization tactics are not related to newcomers' P-O fit, while content and social aspects have a positive relation with P-O fit (Cable & Parsons, 2001). In sum, the better the fit between employees and their organization, the happier they are with their current work situation (Feldman, 1976) and the more likely they are to successfully assimilate into the organization.

## 2.5 Socialization content – newcomers & information

Newcomer assimilation includes members' involvement in their team and organization, developing job competency and social networks, and integrating and settling into the organization (Gailliard et al., 2010). It is suggested that personal contacts (e.g. small talks and serious conversations) between organizational insiders and newcomers can make newcomers feel less confused about their roles in their organizations (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006). Furthermore, social activities or personal bonding aim to expand and deepen relationships and may take place through e.g. socializing with colleagues after work or through participating in organizations' internal sport activities (Bullis & Bach, 1989), and through informal conversations between newcomers and other organizational members (Louis, Posner & Powell, 1983).

Successful assimilation requires newcomers to develop understandings of the organization (Chao et al., 1994). According to Morrison (1993), information is a crucial factor for newcomer learning and adjustment during the assimilation process. Furthermore, information received during assimilation is the socialization content, and the way newcomers acquire it may determine the effectiveness of socialization process (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999). As summarized by Comer (1991), assimilation requires newcomers to acquire both job-related skills and insights about the organization, such as group norms and values by asking others directly or by observing the outcomes of other members' behaviors.

It is suggested that accurate, appropriate, and sufficient information is crucial for newcomers to become successfully socialized into the organization (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004). As summarized by Comer (1991), newcomers can be seen as active information-seekers trying to minimize the uncertainty and stress caused by their new environment, or as passive recipients of information provided by organizational members that hope to train newcomers to meet standards and to perform tasks as expected. However, according to Feldman (1976), many newcomers feel that before becoming friendly and being able to trust their coworkers, they are not able to find important information that could help them to perform their work well.

### 2.5.1 Content areas

Researchers have identified different assimilation content areas which newcomers are expected to master after successful assimilation. These areas are summarized in the table below:

*Table 3: Assimilation content areas*

Chao et al. (1994)	Myers & Oetzel (2003)	Gailliard et al. (2010)
Performance proficiency	Familiarity with others	Familiarity with coworkers
People	Acculturation	Familiarity with supervisors
Politics	Recognition	Acculturation
Language	Involvement	Recognition
Organizational goals & values	Job competency	Involvement
History	Adaptation & role negotiation	Job competency
		Role negotiation

The first column of Table 3, lists Chao et al.'s (1994) classification of six different assimilation dimensions that describes the content areas that newcomers are expected to learn and become socialized in performance proficiency, people, politics, language, organizational goals and values, and history. Performance proficiency describes what needs to be learned in order for newcomers to perform their tasks successfully, hence it can be affected directly through socialization process. People describes the relationships newcomers establish with others. Politics describes organization's formal and informal work relationships and power structures. Language describes the professional and technical language, acronyms, slang and jargons that might be unique to the organizations. Organizational goals and values is a dimension that is included in many definitions of socialization, through which newcomers are linked – not just to their job and immediate work group – but also to the whole organization. History describes the organizational traditions, customs, myths, and rituals through which cultural knowledge is conveyed further (Ritti & Funkhouser, 1987).

Chao et al. (1994) found that employees who were about to leave their organizations were not highly socialized into their organization's goals, values, and history. If one fails to be socialized into organizational goals, values, and history, it can indicate readiness to move to another organization. This can happen, for example, if there is a mismatch between person's own and organization's values and goals, which can be the incentive to switch organizations. Furthermore, even though newcomers may be able to perform their tasks successfully and get along with others, their career developments might be limited if they fail to learn about common goals and values of the organization.

Another categorization listed in Table 3, is that of Myers and Oetzel's (2003), who created the Organizational Assimilation Index (OAI) based on their research that was motivated by "the absence of an instrument to measure the rise and fall of assimilation" (p.

439). With an OAI measure, organizations' management could receive information of possible assimilation deficiencies and which of these assimilation dimensions are mostly lacking. OAI includes six dimensions or processes – familiarity with others, acculturation or learning and accepting the organization culture, recognition, involvement, job competency, and adaptation and role negotiation – which all are needed for becoming a full member of an organization. Familiarity with others refers to getting to know supervisors, coworkers, making friends, and feeling comfortable with others, and was depicted as the first step for newcomers to settle in. Acculturation refers to learning and accepting the organizational culture and norms, and the ways of working without violating these norms. Furthermore, newcomers are willing to make personal changes to be able to integrate into the culture. Recognition means that one feels being valued and appreciated by the other members, and that his or her work is important for the organization. Involvement is seen as evidence of being settled in to the organization when one is seeking ways to contribute to the organization. The other members of the organization would recognize the level of involvement and contribution to reflect whether someone is assimilated into the organization or not. Job competency refers to knowing how the job is done and doing it well, which also is an important factor for newcomers to feel accepted. Adaptation and role negotiation signify that newcomers have integrated and settled into the organization when compromising between their own expectations and the ones of the organization. Usually, this means compromises from the newcomers. (Myers & Oetzel, 2003)

Myers and Oetzel (2003) found a positive relationship between all six dimensions of the OAI and newcomers' job satisfaction and organizational identification. Their findings are aligned with Chao et al.'s (1994) research. For example, Myers and Oetzel (2003) reported that the participants defined the process of getting to know their supervisors as the first step of fitting in, while Chao et al. (1994) findings indicate that their people dimension (i.e. relationships with others) is an important outcome of socialization. Similarly, Myers and Oetzel's (2003) acculturation dimension is aligned with Chao et al.'s (1994) organizational goals and values dimension indicating that if one fails to accept the organizational culture and norms, i.e. there is a mismatch between personal goals and values and organizational ones, he or she is likely to leave the organization.

Furthermore, Gailliard et al. (2010) revised the OAI created by Myers and Oetzel. Based on their study, one additional dimension was added, and the original ones were modified a little. Their extended OAI includes seven dimensions: familiarity with coworkers (new addition), familiarity with supervisors (formerly familiarity with others), acculturation,

recognition, involvement, job competency, and role negotiation (formerly adaptation and role negotiation). These have the same definitions as previously defined by Myers and Oetzel (2003), except for familiarity with others, which was broken down into familiarity with supervisors and familiarity with coworkers. They found that these seven individual dimensions can covary as well as differ based on one's tenure, position, and even one's gender. Based on their study, women were found to feel more acculturated than men did, but at the same time, they were found to be less able to negotiate their roles than men were. Furthermore, those newcomers in managerial positions scored significantly higher on each of these factors than those in non-managerial positions. Hence, the extended OAI provides the possibility to identify differences among different groups and tenures.

### 2.5.2 Types of information

It is suggested that, during entry stage, newcomers seek different types of information – technical, referent, social or normative, performance, and social feedback – to reduce uncertainty and cope with their new organizations (Morrison, 1993; Comer, 1991; Miller & Jablin, 1991). Some knowledge can be attained prior to newcomers' entry, but most of the information needed is tacit and/or organization-specific, hence, only available for acquiring on the job like knowledge of the technical language, acronyms and jargon which might be unique to the organization (Comer, 1991; Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1985; Chao et al., 1994).

Technical information is needed to obtain necessary skills and knowledge to execute given tasks competently, hence this information helps newcomers to increase their role clarity. If newcomers fail to acquire technical information, they risk performing their tasks poorly. Previous studies show that newcomers engage in inquires rather than monitoring activities when trying to acquire technical information. Furthermore, technical information can be either factual or procedural. Factual technical information concerns facts and skills or advices to acquire such information, while procedural technical information concerns organization-specific method or process to complete a task. (Comer, 1991; Morrison, 1993; Bauer & Green, 1998) In addition, as summarized by Morrison (1993), newcomers need information about the expectations of others for being able to define their roles in organizations. Hence, referent information describes the requirements and expectations for the employee to perform successfully the given tasks (Miller & Jablin, 1991).

In addition to mastering their new roles and tasks, newcomers need information about common norms and values to be able to adapt to the organizational culture and to the work group (Morrison, 1993). It is suggested that the more social information newcomers acquire



and the more they are supported by their supervisors, the better they should be able to adjust themselves and feel accepted by other organizational members (Bauer & Green, 1998). In other words, normative or social information is knowledge about people, norms and values of their work environment, which also have effects on job performance. Organizational goals and values include also unwritten, informal, tacit goals and values maintained by the other organizational members. Newcomers are also required to acquire information about formal and informal work relationships and power structures within the organization. The information concerns either insiders or outsiders of the newcomers' immediate work environment. (Comer, 1991; Chao et al., 1994)

Furthermore, newcomers need feedback in order to integrate into their organizations and perform their tasks successfully. Feedback guides newcomers to identify where their behavior or performance is inappropriate, and modifications are needed. Performance feedback or appraisal information informs the employee if he or she is performing as expected. Social feedback or relational information describes the nature of relationships with others and their acceptance of newcomers' non-task behavior. (Morrison, 1993; Miller & Jablin, 1991)

In her study, Stohl (1986) found that every interviewee was able to identify a "memorable" message received from a co-worker who had worked longer in the organization, and most of the messages occurred during the first couple of months of employment. It was found that newcomers had received most of the memorable messages when they were facing the greatest level of ambiguity within the organization. These memorable messages, i.e. messages that one remembers a long period of time and perceives as "life-changing", are one of the most important ones through which requisite information is shared with newcomers.

### 2.5.3 Information-seeking tactics

While many interactions in organizations involve information seeking, it is particularly crucial and unique for organizational newcomers during the organizational entry since uncertainty acts as an impulse to seek information. Furthermore, when being new to organizational behaviors and values, newcomers seek information more consciously and rely on information acquired from other organizational members to develop their role clarity and settle in (Kellermann & Reynolds, 1990; Miller & Jablin, 1991).

According to Miller and Jablin (1991), information-seeking efforts during the entry phase, are of critical for newcomers to successfully assimilate into the organization. Hence,

newcomers are advised to actively reduce their uncertainty by seeking information from others themselves, to be able to perform their work successfully instead of waiting for their supervisors and co-workers to provide it. Usually newcomers seek information from their immediate supervisors, co-workers and subordinates, or from other organizational acquaintances such as other managers and employees from other departments. However, it seems that newcomers are more likely to seek information from their co-workers than from any other internal or external organizational member, and in addition, newcomers turn to their supervisors more likely than to subordinates or external organizational members. (Teboul, 1994)

As summarized by Miller and Jablin (1991), while seeking information, people are fairly conscious of the rewards and costs embedded in interactions with others. Rewards include, for example, the acquisition of resources, such as acquiring information needed to reduce uncertainty, as well as social acceptance and respect. In contrast, costs are the opposite, for example, being rejected by others. Hence, used tactics for acquiring information seem to base on the social costs, and to minimize these costs, newcomers may select information-seeking tactics that are less obvious and more covert. Furthermore, if the source has more power (e.g. a supervisor), the newcomer may prefer different information-seeking tactics than the ones used when information is acquired from co-workers.

The selection of these tactics is likely to depend on newcomers' uncertainty and belief in possible social costs (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Newcomers' lack of knowledge of organizational information-sharing norms enables them to rely on a larger selection of information-seeking tactics than what is available for the existing members. Therefore, it is likely that newcomers use and combine various tactics. In addition, the chosen information-seeking tactic depends on the type of information being sought, its source, the social costs associated with seeking information, and newcomers' role and tasks (Miller, 1996). According to Comer (1991), the more experienced newcomers are, i.e. have more prior job experience, the more likely they are to acquire less of all types of information and use less of all information-seeking tactics.

Information-seeking tactics can be either explicit or implicit. In addition, Comer (1991) has suggested that newcomers have three ways to acquire information: active explicitly, passive explicitly and implicitly (see Table 4). With implicit tactics, information is sought nonverbally, i.e. peers do not even know that information is being acquired from them. Information is sought actively and explicitly when information is acquired verbally indicating that information is being exchanged. Both of implicit and explicit tactics are active

methods. For example, newcomers commonly acquire information they need urgently through active explicit tactics, for instance they seek task-related information to perform their expected tasks successfully. Newcomers acquire information passive explicitly when their peers offer them information. (Comer, 1991)

Table 4: Information seeking tactics

Active explicitly	Implicitly (active method)	Passive explicitly
<p>→ information is acquired verbally indicating that information is being exchanged</p> <p><b>Tactics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overt tactics</li> <li>• Third parties</li> </ul>	<p>→ information is sought nonverbally, i.e. peers do not even know that information is being acquired from them</p> <p><b>Tactics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indirect tactics</li> <li>• Observing</li> <li>• Testing limits</li> </ul>	<p>→ colleagues offer newcomers information</p>

**Active explicit tactics.** As mentioned above, active explicit tactics mean that information is sought verbally from someone (Comer, 1991). According to Miller and Jablin (1991), information-seeking tactics differ based on their overtness and accuracy of the information being sought. When direct information-seeking tactics (e.g. overt questions) are used, information seekers should obtain more quality information than when using less direct means.

**Overt tactics.** Based on Teboul's (1994) and Miller's (1996) results, newcomers use overt tactics (i.e. overt asking) more likely than any other information-seeking tactics. Overt asking is likely to be used when newcomers are comfortable with asking information from a source. It is likely that newcomers utilize this tactic when there is only a minor risk of losing face or being embarrassed. However, newcomers seem to be ready to risk potential negative consequences related to this when they interpret the information needed as vital. With overt tactics, newcomers can acquire specific information more efficiently, clarify possible ambiguities found in received messages, and help themselves in further relational development. During the entry stage of assimilation, overt question asking is highly encouraged. (Miller & Jablin, 1991)

**Third Parties.** This tactic involves using third parties as information sources, replacing a primary source (e.g. supervisor) with a secondary source (e.g. co-worker). This is used generally when the primary sources are unavailable, but also when newcomer are uncomfortable to seek information from a primary source. Further, it seems that secondary sources are more available and convenient, providing social support by conforming

newcomers' impressions and acting as informal socialization agents. However, the danger with this tactic is to receive incorrect or misleading information and to adopt contrary information from what the organization intended. Hence, newcomers exclusively using this tactic are likely to face greater difficulties in reducing role ambiguity. (Miller & Jablin, 1991)

**Implicit tactics.** Newcomers are more likely to use indirect, disguising, and observation tactics, all being implicit tactics, with co-workers than with supervisors. However, when newcomers use testing, they appear very partial about who they test. (Teboul, 1994)

**Indirect tactics.** Tactics associated with indirect questions are non-interrogative questions and hinting. These are usual when newcomers are uncomfortable in seeking information directly from a source or if they seek information, they feel awkward to talk about. With these questions, newcomers can ask questions from other organizational members in a way that does not embarrass newcomers or put the source in spotlight. Hence, these are used as face-saving options. (Miller & Jablin, 1991)

On the other hand, with disguising conversations, newcomers disguise their information-seeking attempts in a natural conversation when they wish to appear nonchalant in their attempts. Information seekers encourage their sources to talk about a particular topic but lack the control over responses, i.e. there is no guarantee that the source does not change the subject to another one before revealing the sought-after information. Joking, the use of objects in the surrounding environment, verbal prompts, and self-disclosure are means to execute this tactic. For example, others' reactions to information seekers' jokes provide clues about their attitudes, i.e. when joking about organizational rules and no one else jokes or laughs along, one might conclude that rules are to be taken seriously. Furthermore, this tactic can be used when newcomers expect high social costs and/or when seeking potentially embarrassing information. It is likely that newcomers use this tactic when they experience uncertainty and/or seek great amounts of information. (Miller & Jablin, 1991)

**Observing.** Observing has commonly been grouped together with surveillance as the two have found to be linked (Miller, 1996). This tactic involves observing sources' behaviors in particular situations and is used when one wish to obtain information concerning a source's attitude or how to perform a given task in a discreet manner. Since newcomers are likely to function with high levels of awareness and to be sensitive to new situations, observing tactics may be utilized more frequently during the organizational entry than during any other times. (Miller & Jablin, 1991) By observing other organizational members, newcomers gain information about organizational goals and values (Kraimer, 1997).

Through observing, newcomers can acquire information that can modify their behaviors and attitudes, for example by acquiring models to imitate (Weiss, 1977). According to Miller and Jablin (1991), it is common for newcomers to “shadow” a co-worker to observe how he or she performs a particular task or applies principles learned during orientation. This tactic might be suitable for obtaining information from co-workers since they are likely to perform tasks similar to the ones newcomers are going to perform providing a comparable basis, and additionally, they are usually more available for observations than supervisors are. In addition, observation can be used simultaneously with other information-seeking tactics. It enables comparisons between past knowledge and new experiences. Through self-comparisons to others, newcomers are able to judge their own behavior and attitudes. However, the tactic is limited by the amount of accurate information that can be obtained by observing others’ attitudes and behaviors. The danger is that observing others’ actions often leads to false interpretations (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

**Testing limits.** This tactic involves testing ones’ limits in a work set-up or interpreting information targets’ responses and attitudes toward particular behaviors. Specific strategies here are “Garfinkeling” and testing. The former involves breaking established rules to find out how salient these rules are and what are the boundary conditions for these rules. When information seekers use this tactic, they focus on the consequences of their actions as a source of information developing knowledge based on experiences. (Garfinkel, 1967) Testing in turn, involves testing rules and boundaries in order to see how much others will tolerate. Newcomers can use this tactic to define relationships or priorities, or to force their supervisors to clarify their expectations on newcomers. The danger with this tactic is that newcomers may receive less clear feedback to their testing efforts, which leaves them in a vicious cycle. (Miller & Jablin, 1991) Therefore, testing is found to be the least preferred tactic to seek information (Miller, 1996).

To conclude, prior research suggest that newcomers seek technical information primarily by asking directly, while they used observation for other types of information, such as e.g. work norms. Furthermore, newcomers use different information-seeking tactics with supervisors and co-workers. Newcomers seek technical information, performance feedback, and information about their role demands primarily from their supervisors, while they search for normative and social information primarily from their co-workers. (Morrison, 1993)

#### 2.5.4 Factors influencing information-seeking

Information sources provide newcomers a wide range of information, each source is, however, likely to emphasize certain content based on their responsibilities and expertise (Hart, 2012). As summarized by Miller and Jablin (1991), potential sources from whom to acquire information include messages from management, members of newcomers' immediate work group, other organizational members like secretaries, extra-organizational or third-party sources like clients, and the task itself. It is likely that newcomers focus their information-seeking efforts on their supervisors and co-workers since the other sources might not be equally available or helpful (Hart, 2012; Miller & Jablin, 1991). As remarked by Hart (2012: 204), "since newcomers generally operate in a work unit, the coworkers are in the best position to indicate newcomer acceptance into the work unit." If newcomers find the received information helpful, they are more likely to view that source as credible.

While supervisors has been used as a source for performance proficiency message content, co-workers has been the primary source for people, politics, language, and history messages. Top management, in turn, has been identified as the primary source for organizational goals and values related content. (Hart, 2012)

Though organizations attempt to provide newcomers the necessary information they need to perform their new roles successfully, there might be imperfections in the way information is presented, for example, if the other organizational members forget what it was like to enter a new organization. Newcomers may also face inadequacies when they fail to interpret the acquired information received from other members. (Miller & Jablin, 1991)

Furthermore, organizational, group and individual factors such as the type of organization entered, interactions within the team, and newcomers' prior experiences, affect newcomers' information-seeking tactics (Comer, 1991). In addition, the level of uncertainty and social costs are also likely to affect the ways newcomers seek information. For example, newcomers with lower self-esteems might not search information as much as the ones with higher self-esteems. Furthermore, the ways organizations socialize newcomers may also have an effect. For example, newcomers experiencing individual socialization tactics may establish personal relationships with co-workers from whom they can rely on to acquire information. (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Jones, 1986; Louis, 1980b)

Miller (1996) found that newcomers were more likely to use observation, third party, indirect, and testing tactics when they perceive a situation to have high social costs. In contrast, when a situation is perceived to have low social costs, newcomers use overt tactics

more often. Miller also found that the type of information being sought affects newcomers' information-seeking tactics. When seeking referent or appraisal information, newcomers are more likely to use overt tactics, while observation is more often used to acquire relational information.

## **2.6 Technology-mediated assimilation**

Previous research on newcomer assimilation have primarily focused on co-located teams, i.e. organizational members working together in the same location (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). However, nowadays, it is common to have teams located in different geographic locations and countries spanning different time zones (Lu, Watson-Manheim & Chudoba, 2014), particularly in the context of software development teams (Boden, Nett & Wulf, 2010). One specific case is globally distributed software development teams where two or more teams are working together but from different geographical locations to achieve common goals (Oshri et al., 2007).

### **2.6.1 Newcomer assimilation in a virtual context**

According to DeSanctis and Monge (1999), a geographically dispersed (virtual) team is a “collection of geographically distributed, functionally and culturally diverse people who are linked by electronic forms of communication” (p. 693). Based on previous research, even the most dispersed organizational members are assimilated into organizations and work groups through different stages. However, the duration of assimilation stages, the interactions with others and the technical channels may differ from those of co-located organizations. (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004) Furthermore, especially, in virtual teams, assimilation may occur differently than in co-located teams. The challenge is as the team members are primarily communicating via electronic communication tools. (Picherit-Duthler, Long & Kohut, 2004)

In addition, in the context of software developers, they are expected to re-tool themselves for their new jobs, i.e. they are required to learn not only the new work context, but also new software systems. In order to become successfully assimilated into their new organization, they might need to learn project-specific programming language and tools which may be new to them. (Sim & Holt, 1998) Hence, Sim and Holt (1999) refers to modern software developers as “software immigrants” as they might need to learn new language and culture just like real-life immigrants.

The use of technology-mediated communications is used to bridge distance and can be used to foster newcomers' assimilation into a virtual team. In fact, the growing amount of cutting-edge technologies has broadened newcomers' possibilities to find social support. However, in virtual teams, social cues to guide newcomers' assimilation may be minimal or nonexistent due to the lack of physical environment. (Ahuja & Carley, 1999; Ahuja & Galvin, 2003; Lewandowski, Rosenberg, Parks & Siegel, 2011) Therefore, newcomers may face challenges to adopt and adjust to a virtual work environment and may require more communication.

Oshri and colleagues (2007) suggest that in globally distributed teams, assimilation is most successful when it takes place through the use of both electronic communication and face-to-face interactions. Hence, face-to-face means are no less important in virtual teams than in co-located teams but should be preceded and followed by virtual activities (Oshri et al., 2007). Past research, also show that face-to-face meetings are important for distributed teams through establishing interpersonal relationships as the team members are able to socialize with each other (Crowston et al., 2007). Furthermore, Crowston et al. also found that face-to-face time facilitates online interactions as, after meeting face-to-face, team members are more comfortable to send others e-mails. Face-to-face meetings have also been found to affect team collaboration positively in general (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003).

According to Oshri, Kotlarsky and Willcocks (2008), in hybrid teams, i.e. teams consisting of co-located teams and virtual teams, assimilation should be supported and developed within and across these teams. Furthermore, virtual teams usually have to transfer their common work policies and culture to the newcomers to be able to collaborate with different teams (Cascio, 2000). Hence, Oshri et al. (2007) suggest that during entry, newcomers are introduced to the common organizational norms and behaviors to guide and maintain the collaboration within the remote teams. Infrequent and limited face-to-face meetings with remote team members might hinder the information sharing of norms, attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, the reduction of communication barriers is crucial in facilitating communication between remote teams. Later on, face-to-face meetings can be used to support the assimilation process, providing remote team members the possibility to clear any misunderstandings and collaboration issues. (Oshri et al., 2007) Especially in newly formed dispersed teams, face-to-face meetings are important to support collaboration, and should at least take place once (Cramton, 2002). In addition, Crampton (2002) found that face-to-face meetings are important for building relationships and trust among team



members. It would therefore be useful for people to visit each other's locations at least once to gain more understanding of the context the others are working.

As virtual teams are commonly expected to be autonomous, i.e. team members are expected to be self-motivated and self-managed, trust is a crucial factor for virtual work to be successful. Low level of trust affects the teams' performance negatively and may detract members from working according to common guidelines and objectives. (Cascio, 2000; Shin, 2004) In addition, in the context of software development, trust issues may occur if the core site, i.e. the site owning the core code of the product questions the remote sites' abilities to handle the assigned tasks (Grinter, Herbsleb & Perry, 1999). Furthermore, it is suggested that the lack of shared work practices is a greater block to successful performance in virtual teams and virtual collaboration than distance itself (Chudoba, Wynn, Lu & Watson-Manheim, 2005). Hence, management should carefully consider which core behaviors are enhancing virtual team functioning, and consequently train organizational members in these skills, since they may be new to them. Based on previous research, these behaviors include virtual-collaborative skills, virtual-socialization skills, and virtual-communication skills. The first include the ability to exchange ideas, while the second include the ability to communicate with other others and apologize for mistakes. The latter includes the ability to rephrase unclear messages, acknowledge the received messages, and respond as quickly as possible. (Cascio, 2000)

According to Applbaum, Bodaken, Sereno and Anatol (1974: 9), "communication is the glue that holds the team structure together; it is the enzyme that allows the group process to function." As such, collaboration in virtual teams is largely dependent on electronic communication (Shin, 2004), and is one of the challenges that needs to be taken into consideration when implementing a virtual work environment (Cascio, 2000). Virtual teams face challenges in communication, which could cause conflicts to burst out and to escalate, and/or difficulties with team building (Cramton, 2001). According to Lu et al. (2014), effective communication is key to productive performance but also to develop work strategies and processes that improves the overall level of performance.

However, individuals may experience discontinuity when responses and communication flows are not going as they expected, and they may perceive for instance communication blocks. Team members may not always perceive discontinuity in the same way, hence, what is perceived, as discontinuity at one point might not be later on. (Chudoba & Watson-Manheim, 2008) Furthermore, based on Cascio (2000), since virtual communication commonly lack non-verbal cues, team members must replace these with

other forms of communication, for example, by asking more questions to make sure they understand each other fully.

### 2.6.2 Information seeking in a virtual context

Previously, as noted by Waldeck et al. (2004), organizational assimilation studies focusing on information-seeking practices that reduce uncertainty, have focused on traditional channels like face-to-face interactions and company manuals. However, similar to information-seeking tactics, the selection of technology to acquire information depends also on organizational socialization tactics, specific assimilation stage, types of information necessary in that particular stage, newcomers' individual characteristics, and organizational norms (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004).

Advanced communication and information technologies (ACITs) or electronic media are, as defined by Culnan and Markus (1987: 422), "interactive, computer-mediated technologies that facilitate two-way interpersonal communication among several individuals" via "written text, recorded or synthesized voice messages, graphical representation of communicators and/or data, or moving images of the communicators and/or message content". The definition of ACIT (including technologies such as e.g. email, Internet, Web pages, Intranet, online chats, online databases, instant messaging, and videoconferencing) highlights the important characteristics of contemporary media that distinguish them from the more traditional ones (e.g. face-to-face interactions, hardcopy materials such as memos and handbooks) (Waldeck et al., 2004). It is worth to notice, however, that these more advanced technologies might have been available for organizational members in previous studies' samples, but researchers have not focused on them. Furthermore, Waldeck et al. (2004) remarked that it is highly unlikely that organizational members would rely on traditional channels in present-day organizations. In general, ACITs are likely to increase the frequency of organizational communication, promote group unity and performance, and provide an opportunity for information exchange.

As described by Flanagin and Waldeck (2004), as technologies become more sophisticated, assimilation process and its content are changing to become more efficient, less ambiguous, and less stressful. In their research, Waldeck et al. (2004) explored the relationship between three information-seeking channels (face-to-face communication, traditional media like manuals, and ACITs) and found that face-to-face communication was the most important predictor of assimilation effectiveness, followed by advanced ACITs and traditional media respectively. They remarked that the decreasing importance of traditional

technology might be a result of the growing use of more advanced technologies. Hence, ACITs have significantly influenced the ways organizational members acquire and share information, the relations among organizational members, and the external communication efforts. The use of ACITs expands the opportunities to actively seek information to support successful assimilation. Therefore, these should be studied more explicitly in future studies.

According to Ahuja and Galvin (2003), in virtual settings, newcomers seek information from organizational insiders, who provide it just like in a traditional work team. However, in co-located teams, people may use passive means, i.e. observing actions and behaviors, to acquire information rather than ask others about processes and expectations (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Comer, 1991). This may be impossible in virtual teams, and hence, tacit knowledge sharing must be substituted with explicit communication. In virtual teams, regulative and normative or social information must be verbalized, as one cannot use observations anymore. Therefore, newcomers need to be more active in acquiring information. (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003) According to Cramton (2002), when members work from different locations, it is more likely that they will hold different information and not be aware of it. In addition, the lack of face-to-face contact may make it more difficult for members to understand messages. Hence, in a virtual setting, understanding messages and establishing meaning of information as well as managing feedback during discussions can be difficult (DeSanctis & Monge, 1999). In addition, the use of electronic channels can make it difficult to resolve possible problems quickly, which can damage work relationships (Cramton, 2002).

ACITs have changed the availability of information and the ways organizations communicate. For example, during anticipatory stage, newcomers may rely on organizational Web pages prior to personal contact with organizational insiders. During the entry stage, newcomers may acquire information from impersonal sources, i.e. from written, electronic or task-related sources. Newcomers may rely on different databases to acquire information about organizational policies, different manuals to acquire technical information, job descriptions for referent information, organizational texts and literature for normative information, and different kinds of reports and performance evaluation forms for feedback. (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Morrison, 1993) The advantage here is that the information seeker can avoid social costs of asking directly (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). For example, newcomers with high self-monitoring, i.e. pay close attention to their behavior, may be likely to acquire information through advanced technologies rather than through more traditional channels as they might be afraid to reveal their uncertainty to others. In

addition, impersonal sources may also provide more objective information than is possible to acquire from human sources. However, it is often difficult to acquire information through impersonal sources since information oftentimes tends to be informal and tacit and does not exist in written or other impersonal forms. (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Morrison, 1993)

On the other hand, organizational members and practices can also send clear messages to newcomers regarding the acceptance of behaviors and sense making through technology channels. Organizational and team norms for technology use greatly influence newcomers' attitudes to use these technologies. Other members can also influence newcomers' technology use and their interpretations of technology effectiveness by providing feedback, using that technology themselves, and/or communicate their own assessment of that technology. For example, based on newcomers' decisions of technology use, they receive feedback regarding the appropriateness of their use, and the information they acquired through technology channels. Based on this feedback, newcomers can interpret if socialization has been effective or not and subsequently decide to engage in the same technology use or modify their behaviors. Based on positive feedback, one might continue to use the technology in the same fashion, but if one is being criticized for the use, he or she might change the way the technology is being used or even stop using it. Hence, the use of technologies can affect the roles newcomers take while seeking information, and consequently, their sense of information correspondence, and their satisfaction with the assimilation process. (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Waldeck et al., 2004)

According to Waldeck et al. (2004), ACIT users are usually geographically distributed, and both asynchronous and synchronous ways to use these technologies are possible. The former includes e-mail, while the latter includes phone and online chats. Based on Oshri et al. (2007), during the early stages of projects, remote team members did not feel confident in contacting their remote colleagues by phone, and therefore, e-mail was the main collaborative tool. After the remote team members had met, the use of synchronous media increased. Technologies provide a way to achieve adjustment within organizations and a central focus to everyday work and social relationships. For example, in some organizations, traditional communication channels like face-to-face meetings may be less common or even nonexistent. As interactive and information-disseminating technologies become more common, newcomers have greater opportunities to communicate with other organizational members and learn about their organizations. (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004)

However, based on Cramton (2002), the dispersed teams seem to be vulnerable to; communication failures, information being distributed unevenly, differences in perceptions

of what is important information to the sender and the receiver, differences in speed and timing, and cause uncertainty about the meaning of silence. Communication failures include difficulties in remembering when someone is out of office if that person is from a distant team. In addition, the differences in the relative speed of communication (e.g. how quickly one responds) can hinder collaboration, which may cause confusion. Furthermore, silence could mean everything from an agreement with the statement to disagreement, being out of office to being busy with other things, or not noticing the message to not understanding that a response was wanted. To prevent the misunderstanding of silence, team members should be given clear information about how often others are checking and responding to messages. Furthermore, when remembering to provide prompt feedback on the message at hand, it can help remote team members to feel others' presence. In sum, the failure of establishing a common ground may lead to not being able to fulfill each other's expectations. (Cramton, 2002)

## 2.7 Successful assimilation

Organizational assimilation should be a two-way influence process (Feldman, 1994). Hence, it should involve both newcomers and other members of the organization. Figure 2 describes the antecedents and outcomes of successful newcomer assimilation during the assimilation process (Bauer et al., 2007). As seen from the picture, both newcomers' own as well as organizations' socialization actions affect newcomers' successful assimilation.



Figure 2. Antecedents and outcomes of successful newcomer assimilation.

During newcomer assimilation, trying to become an organizational membership can produce anxiety even for those members confident in their social and professional competence as so much is at stake (Waldeck et al., 2004). Therefore, newcomers' abilities to reduce uncertainty and, consequently, stress and anxiety commonly leads to effective organizational assimilation, improving newcomers' contributions and commitment to their organizations as well as overall satisfaction (Jablin, 2001). Hence, for both newcomers and

organizations, a relatively quick integration and adjustment is desirable. As summarized by Reichers (1987), for newcomers, this means to reduce anxiety and stress quickly, while from the organization's point-of-view, this means that the newcomer can focus more on job performance. Furthermore, from a process point-of-view, successful assimilation means that a newcomer is proceeding successfully in becoming integrated into an organization, become proficient in the given tasks and is able to resolve conflicts of the current stage. In addition, newcomers understand their organizational roles and the criteria by which they will be evaluated. In contrast, if the newcomer fails to progress through this process, the assimilation is failing. (Feldman, 1976; Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004)

As can be seen from Figure 2, effective assimilation is linked to increased job satisfaction and performance as well as to commitment to the organization and, consequently, to decreased turnover (Wanous, 1980; Louis, 1980b; Bauer et al., 2007). It is suggested that the more successful the assimilation is for newcomers, the better they engage in their organization. For example, if newcomers fail to gain role clarity, the lack of clarification is likely to hinder performance since the lack of knowledge about what to do and how may decrease the level of job performance. (Bauer & Green, 1994) Furthermore, Bauer et al. (2007) found that gaining role clarity relates positively to all of the assimilation outcomes (see Figure 2) except turnover. Therefore, successful assimilation requires newcomers to overcome many of the negative aspects they may encounter as they integrate into a new organization, such as stress, surprise, anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion. Those newcomers, who fail to cope with these negative aspects, may face a lower quality employee-organization relationship. (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006)

According to Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler and Saks (2014), newcomers' proactive behavior predicts their learning, well-being and work engagement. Hence, by being proactive, newcomers can accelerate and facilitate their successful assimilation into organizations. Figure 3 describes the assimilation rates, defined by Reichers (1987), which are likely to occur, based on the level of proactive behaviors of newcomers and organizational insiders. Rapid rate (cell 2) occurs when both newcomers and insiders are highly proactive, meaning frequent interactions and quick assimilation when anxiety is reduced effectively, i.e. newcomers become effective organizational members more quickly. This is the ideal situation for both newcomers and organizations. In contrast, slow rate (cell 3) represents a situation where both newcomers' and insiders' level of proactive behavior is low, meaning infrequent interactions and slow assimilation. Newcomers are usually separated from the insiders, hence, remaining anxious longer. Intermediate rate (cells 1 & 4)

occurs when only the other party – newcomer or insider – is highly proactive, while the other party remains non-proactive. It is likely that interaction occurs more frequently than in slow rates, but still less frequently than, when both parties are proactive. However, as the balance between interactions attempts (i.e. only one party is proactive) is unequal, the more proactive party may reduce the interactions attempts, leading to similar situation as in slow rate where neither one is proactive.

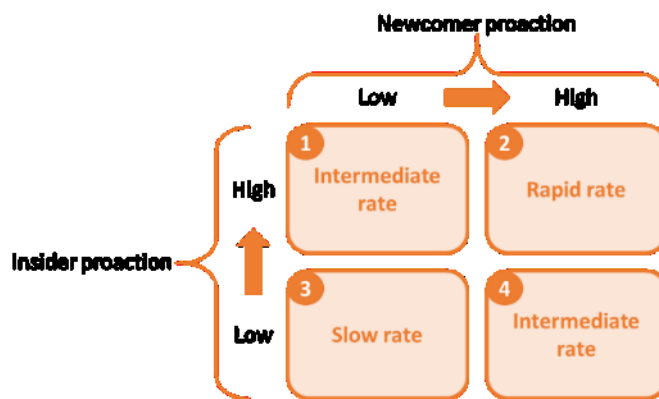


Figure 3. Assimilation rates.

Based on Reichers (1987), interactions between newcomers and insiders are more likely to occur and socialization rates heightened when both parties proactively seek interactions, for example, by asking questions, stopping by others' desk to talk, having lunch together, and participating in social activities. Reichers (1987) concludes that organizations may accelerate the rate of initial socialization by putting in place procedures that require newcomers and insiders to interact.

## 2.8 Studying newcomer assimilation in this thesis

In Chapter 2, I presented the key factors affecting newcomer assimilation. First, socialization tactics, through which organizations can affect newcomers' assimilation, were presented. Then, I explained the person-organization fit theory, and how the fit between an individual's own values and an organization's values affects the assimilation. This was followed by a description of newcomers' information seeking tactics and the types of information needed so newcomers would be able to assimilate into their new organization. As these above-mentioned activities concentrated on face-to-face interactions, the technology-mediated assimilation was also discussed to gain more knowledge of how newcomer assimilation occur in the virtual context and in software development companies as well as in a virtual context. Finally, I concentrated on what successful assimilation means in practice. This literature review lay the ground for the methodology of this thesis, which is presented next.

### 3 Research methodology

This section provides details about how the empirical part of the study was carried out, and how the collected data was analyzed. First, the research design and selected methods are introduced. Then, the case company is introduced, followed by detailed descriptions of the data, its collection process as well as the analysis process. Finally, the evaluation of the research related to its trustworthiness is discussed.

#### 3.1 Research design

This thesis aims to study the newcomer assimilation process in a software company establishing a new, geographically remote office to Romania, and in doing so, moves from having a local R&D unit to having a global R&D unit. The goal is to identify the most critical factors to be taken into account when establishing a distant office by defining the key factors affecting the ways the newcomers assimilate into the work culture and common work practices as well as how socialization, face-to-face, and virtual activities affect the assimilation.

As research method, the qualitative case study was chosen. Qualitative research is open-ended in nature, providing researchers the opportunity to find unforeseen areas within the lives of the people being investigated. Qualitative research also enables to study people's behaviors within a specific social setting. (Holliday, 2008) Furthermore, qualitative research aims to describe people's real-life, aiming to study the nature of people's experiences and to expose the research objects' interpretations by giving them voice (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). Therefore, based on above mentioned, as this research aims to study newcomers' experiences and their interpretations of their assimilation, as well as exploring factors that affects their assimilation, qualitative research methods was chosen.

Furthermore, in business research, case study is one of the most used qualitative research strategies. Case study tries to explain, explore or describe a phenomenon at hand by studying one or a few selected cases through financial data, interviews, memoranda, business plans, organization charts, questionnaires, and observations, for example. Usually, the research subject is an industry, an organization or a part of it, or a particular process, providing the opportunity to understand organizations thoroughly in a very realistic nature. (Koskinen, Alasuutari & Peltonen, 2005; Ellram, 1996; Meredith, 1998) Because of this, the case study is a useful method for studying assimilation processes in on organization.



Furthermore, a single case study method (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009) was chosen to understand the specific phenomenon at hand more deeply by studying the newcomer assimilation process of one case company, restricting the research to this particular context. The study aims to answer the research questions consisting of what and how –questions and seeks an in-depth understanding of the specific contextual factors of the chosen research setting.

During case studies, rigorous data collection, observation and triangulation are used rather than mathematics or statistics (Gerwin, 1981). According to Ellram (1996), the primary data collection techniques used as part of case studies are direct observation, recordings and interviews, and by using more than one technique the validity of the research can be improved. Furthermore, in case studies, first sources such as direct observations (i.e. seeing it oneself) are important rather than relying on second-hand sources (i.e. speaking to someone who saw something) (Meredith, 1998).

In this study, field observations and interviews were chosen as the research methods because they provide the possibility to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon and context. Saunders et al. (2009) suggest that “if your research question(s) and objectives are concerned with what people do, an obvious way in which to discover this is to watch them do it” (p. 288). Observation includes recording, description, analysis and interpretation of peoples’ behavior. Participant observation aims to discover the meaning that people attach to their actions, and the advantages include the possibility to examine people in a particular social context as well as to deepen the understandings of social processes. In this study, the observer’s role was merely to act as spectator to collect interpretations of the context without participating in the observed activities.

Furthermore, as stated by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009), when the goal is to understand what the research subjects think or why they behave in a certain way, it is best to ask them directly. The goal is to gain as much knowledge as possible from the interviewee. The advantage of interviews lies in their flexible nature as the interviewer is able to repeat questions, correct misunderstood ones or explain further when necessary, and to ask follow-up questions when discovering something interesting. In contrast, surveys usually lack this kind of flexibility, which is why, in this thesis, qualitative means for collecting data were chosen instead of surveys. Interviews were considered to be the primary method but to ensure the broad understanding of the topic, observations were combined with interviews.

In particular, semi-structured interviews were chosen for the research interviews of this thesis. Semi-structured interviews consist of predefined themes, which are the same for

every interviewee, emphasizing interviewees' interpretations and experiences. In practice, these themes base on existing theory and literature. However, the order of questions is not predetermined as the order of questions can be modified as the interview progresses. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009) Hence, semi-structured interviews provide some structure of the interview and ensure that all the themes defined based on the used literature, are covered during the interviews, while allowing new themes to emerge. When informants bring forward new interesting facts, follow up questions can be initiated beyond the interview protocol.

In sum, based on the discussion above, conducting a qualitative case study where semi-structured interviews together with observation as participant approach is justified.

### **3.2 Case company**

The case company is a globally operating software development company, established in Finland in 2000. Nowadays, the company has between 500 to 1 000 employees across its operating countries, and the number has increased steadily during the recent years. The company has at the start of this study just established a new office to Romania to improve its possibilities of finding skillful developers.

This study focuses on the software R&D department and its teams. The department has previously operated only in Finland but now the department consists of three teams in two different locations; one team in Finland and two teams in Romania, with a few persons in Finland serving as architect and business lead to the Romanian site. The case company has a common new hire orientation program, consisting of a week of general trainings at a European based office, in which all company newcomers are required to participate. However, the first newcomers were brought to Finland to have their orientation period before the new office was ready. The purpose of this visit was to bring the different R&D teams from Finland and Romania together, so that they would meet each other, and so that newcomers could learn practices from the organizational insiders.

The case company is developing software products by using Agile methods, more precisely, they follow Scrum as their work process. According to Schwaber and Beedle (2002), Scrum is a development process for team tasks including short developmental repetitive rounds during which teams carry out their predetermined tasks defined during planning meeting. Usually, the teams in Scrum are self-organized and self-managed, hence, their work is very independent, and they perform the tasks autonomously in a way they find to be the most suitable way. Scrum process includes a series of meetings like daily status

meetings, planning and retrospective meetings. For example, the teams started their mornings by having the daily status meeting where everybody told what they did the day before and what they are going to work on that day.

Though the Scrum teams are expected to be self-organized, they still have two assigned roles. The Product Owner (PO) represents the customer in the development process, hence, have the overall responsible for the project's success or failure. The other role is the Scrum Master (SM) who is responsible of facilitating teamwork and removing blocks as well as ensuring that the team follows established rules. (Schwaber & Beedle, 2002) All project teams had their own POs and SWs, although at the Romanian site, there were established after a few weeks into the entry stage.

Currently, the Romanian teams work in the same product development project as the Finnish team, requiring lot of collaboration and communication from both sites. Hence, it can be seen as a distributed project, though in the future, the goal might be to have separate projects for each site. Since they are working with the same project, their tasks are interdependent to some degree. Therefore, the teams used also an issue tracking management tool that lists all the tasks assigned to the teams as well as each team members' current tasks, enabling task tracking and allocation. Overall, the teams had the common Scrum roles and organized the needed Scrum meetings, although the Finnish established team detracted from some common rules in scrum, which will be explained in more detail in the results section.

### **3.3 Data collection**

This section describes the data used in this thesis and its collection process. First, the data collection procedures are discussed in addition to detailed description of the data, followed by the description of how and when the interviews were conducted.

In this study, data collection was part of a larger academic project of Aalto University. Data was collected together with the Project Manager, Emma Nordbäck, by interviewing the employees of the case company.

#### **3.3.1 Data collection procedure**

Before conducting the interviews, the sample group was defined. In qualitative research, the amount of data is usually limited, putting more emphasis on the quality of data (Eskola & Suoranta, 2001). Hence, in this study, the sample group was selected to cover those employees of the case company who were affected by or who took active part in the

newcomer assimilation process. Figure 4 summarizes the sample group, the collected data and the timeline of the study.

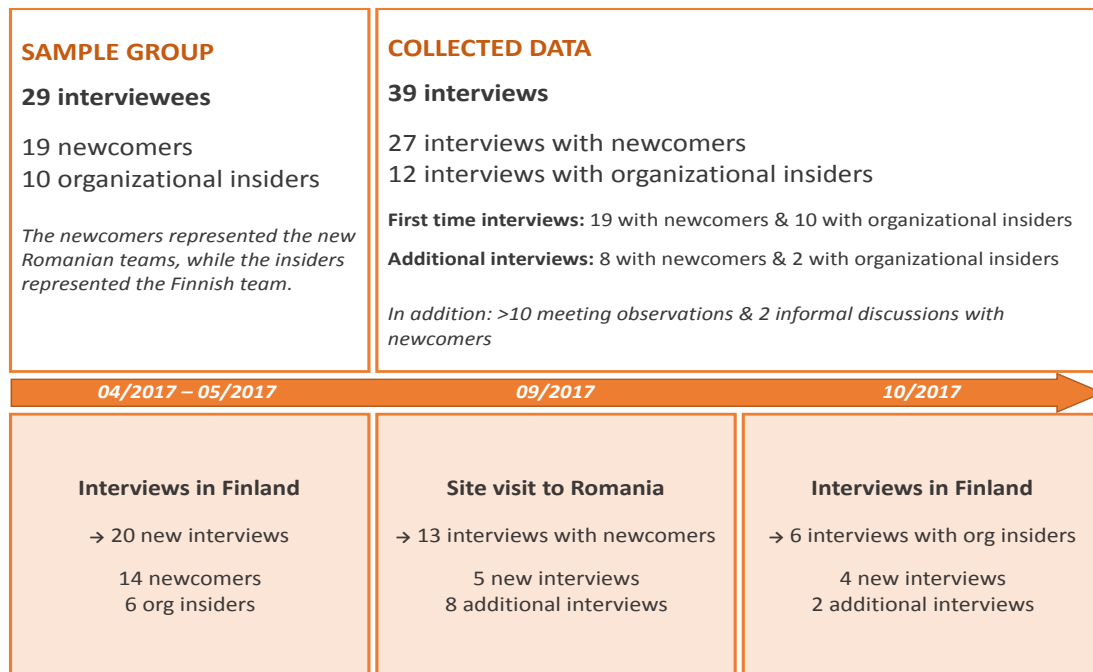


Figure 4: Summary of collected data and its collection timeline.

**Sample group.** As can be seen in Figure 4, the sample group consists of 29 interviewees (i.e. 29 individuals) in total, from which 19 were newcomers (Romanians) and 10 were organizational insiders (Finnish). In other words, all the new R&D employees who started to work at the new office during the time window of this thesis were interviewed. The group of organizational insiders represented those key persons from the Finnish team, who acted as formal mentors to the newcomers and/or who were otherwise actively interacting with the newcomers or were responsible for the establishment of the Romanian R&D (e.g. VP and CTO of R&D). Eight of the interviewees were female, while 21 were male; however, to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, the gender is not analyzed further.

**Collected data.** As can be further seen in Figure 4, the collected data consists of 39 interviews in total, from which 27 interviews were with Romanian newcomers and 12 with organizational insiders. Moreover, the data includes 29 first-time interviews, out of which 19 are with newcomers and 10 with organizational insiders. The number of additional interviews is 10, which contain eight follow-up interviews with newcomers, and two with the organizational insiders.

**Study timeline.** The study timeline can also be seen from Figure 4. The first interviews were conducted during the spring 2017 by the Project Manager and the rest ones by me in September and October except for a few exceptions. All interviews were conducted at the case company's premises, providing the opportunity to observe meetings and informal interactions as well. The study included one-week site visit to Romania where newcomers were interviewed either for the first time or in a second time follow up interview. More specifically, 14 newcomers joined the company during the spring 2017, and were interviewed in Finland during their orientation period. Eight of them were interviewed again in follow-up interviews during the site visit to Romania, after they had worked for approximately six months. During the same site visit, five new newcomers were interviewed for the first time. This data collection was followed by additional interviews with organizational insiders in Finland in October.

### 3.3.2 Research interviews

This thesis was designed to collect interviewees' first-hand experiences from the studied phenomenon. The interview design was semi-structured and theme-based meaning that the interview structure was divided into different themes, which led the progress of interviews. The interview protocol was refined based on the first couple of interviews, which then resulted in three different interview protocols. Different interview protocols were used, depending on the interviewees being interviewed. For first time interviews with the Romanians, i.e. newcomers, there was own protocols as well as for the additional interviews and for the interviews with the organizational insiders. All of these can be found in Attachment A, B and C at the end of this thesis. However, all interviews started with an explanation of the purpose of this study together with background information questions. In addition, most of the themes discussed during interviews were the same for all, though, the predefined questions varied based on the interviewee. The interview questions were defined based on the research questions and previous literature. Additional questions were used if further information was needed from a specific topic mentioned by the interviewees. However, the questions were defined so that no academic terminology were used but rather a more common language familiar to the interviewees was used. According to Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012), by using existing theory and terminology, some key aspects might remain uncovered as the interviewees most often do not use those in their descriptions.

Each interview started with introduction questions warming up the interviewee, including questions about their role and background. In the first interviews with the

newcomers, the Romanians were asked to describe their experiences from their orientation period. The aim was to understand what kind of orientation the newcomers had received, how they experienced it, how other organizational members behaved and supported, and what the newcomers perceived as good or bad when considering their own assimilation experience. Then, questions about the company culture and values were asked to discover how the newcomers had understood and maybe adopted these. In addition, questions related to different face-to-face and virtual activities were asked to discover ways the newcomers seek information and communicate with others. In the end, the newcomers were asked about their teams and collaboration to gain an understanding on the level of social integration. Last, newcomers were asked about their own perception of their fit and assimilation success to the organization.

The additional interviews with the newcomers, started similarly as the first interviews. Then, questions related to the ways the newcomers were using the communication tools and to the ways the newcomers were seeking and sharing information. In addition, questions about the current culture of the new office and the newcomers' interpretations of the level of team integration were asked. The goal was also to discover possible problems and pain points, which might affect the team building and newcomers' assimilation. Extra questions that had not been asked during the first interviews, but had become central for the study, were also asked.

The interviews with the organizational insiders started with an explanation of the research together with the background questions. Then, questions relating to the new Romanian office were asked to discover how the collaboration and communication were at the moment from their perspective. The aim was also to see how well the insiders had accepted the new employees and the new office. The insiders were also asked about their bad experiences to deepen the overall understandings of the current situation by interviewing both sides. In addition, questions related to the ways the insiders were communicating and sharing information with the newcomers through different communication tools were also asked. In the end, future expectations related to the whole software R&D department were discussed.

The goal of this research structure was to collect and understand interviewees' first-hand experiences from the newcomer assimilation process as well as the different face-to-face and virtual activities that might affect the communication and collaboration between Finland and Romania. This is why field observations were also used during the Romanians' site visit to Finland, as well as during the research site visit to Romania. The goal was to

gain further understandings of identified themes, which could not be gained through interviews only. The observations were unstructured from their nature and consisted of observations of meetings and informal discussions taking place at the office.

All the interviews were recorded after asking permission from the interviewees. The average duration of the interviews was approximately 45 minutes and lasted from 15 minutes to 64 minutes. Furthermore, the average duration of the first-round interviews was 51 minutes, while the average duration of the second-round (i.e. follow-up) interviews was 30 minutes.

### **3.4 Data analysis process**

Interviews were preliminarily analyzed during the data collection process to enable possible changes to the interview guide along with lessons learned. Preliminary findings were documented throughout this process. Then, after all of the interviews had been conducted and recorded, a reliable external company that was used in this broader academic project transcribed all 39 interviews. As stated by Saunders et al. (2009), qualitative databases on meanings expressed through words requiring classification into categories through which the analysis is conducted. Hence, the transcribed interviews were then analyzed by using ATLAS.ti, which is a computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) as defined by Saunders et al. (2009). The use of CAQDAS can increase both transparency and methodological rigor as it requires to conduct proper analysis (Saunders et al., 2009).

The goal of coding with ATLAS.ti was to code the transcribed interviews. The code could be assigned to a word only, a sentence or even larger parts of the interviews, and a paragraph could receive multiple codes if it were linked to multiple concepts. If a part of an interview was found to be irrelevant, not belonging to this study's scope, it was skipped and left uncoded. The comprehensive code list can be seen from Appendix D.

The anonymity of the interviewees was guaranteed during the analysis process, and the interviewees cannot be identified as every interviewee has been given a random letter. The interviewees do not know which letter they were given. The newcomers received letters from "A" to "S", while the insiders received from "A" to "J", therefore, if quoted directly, the interviewees are referred to as "Newcomer A" or "Insider A", for example. The anonymity of the case company is also guaranteed as no specified information is used in this thesis. Hence, all possible identifications (e.g. company name) are cleaned out from the used quotes and modified to be more general.

In this thesis, the Gioia methodology, recently developed but rooted in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), is being utilized to guide the data analysis process. According to Strauss & Corbin (1990), through coding the collected data is broken down, conceptualized and combined in new ways. In this data analysis process, the coded interviewed were compressed further into 1<sup>st</sup> order concepts. According to Gioia et al. (2012), in this phase, the categories are not compressed but rather the interviewees' terms are faithfully adhered, causing usually the number of categories to explode.

Then, in 2<sup>nd</sup> order coding, the aim is to explain the observed phenomena by assessing its emerging themes and concepts (Gioia et al., 2012). Hence, these labeled concepts were grouped so that similar concepts were brought together into the same group under a more theoretical label. The 2<sup>nd</sup> order concepts were then compressed further into aggregate dimensions. According to Ellram (1996), this is an important step as the analysis of the data is limited to the categories developed during this process. In the end, 14 aggregate dimensions in six high-level groups were established to include all the dozens of conceptual labels. When all of these phases were completed, and the themes could not be compressed any further, the data structure was build (see Appendix E for the whole data structure), as recommended Gioia et al. (2012). The data structure allows the researcher to describe the data in a visual way, but it also shows graphically how the analysis progress has gone from raw data to terms and to themes that are more abstract. In Figure 5 below, an example of the data structure of this thesis is portrayed. However, it is worth noting that this represents only a small part of the whole data structure.

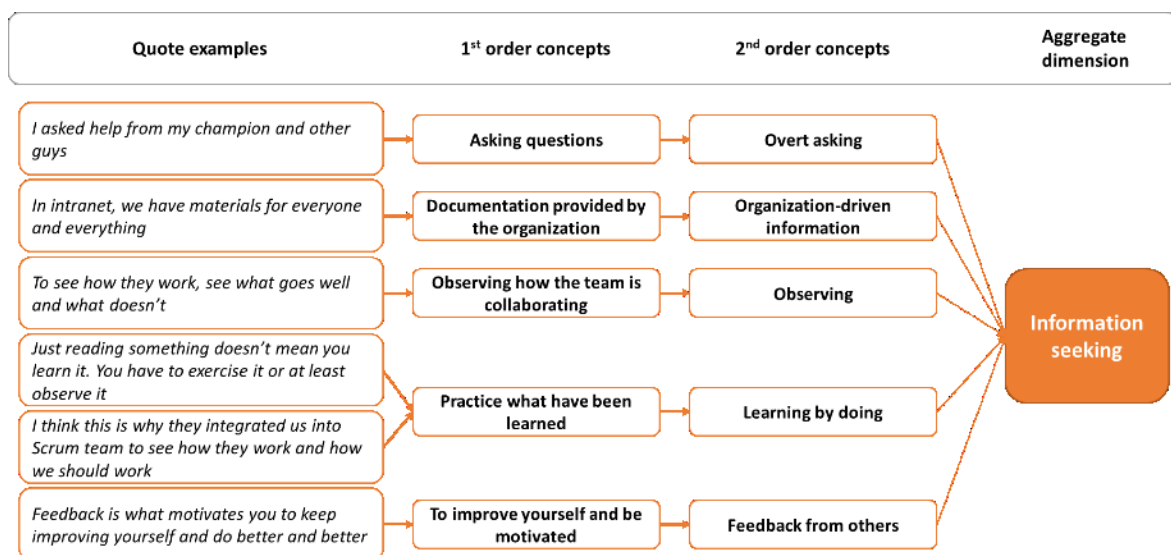


Figure 5. An example of data structure.



Last, I sought for relationships among the identified themes of this study (Gioia et al., 2012), and aimed to link them to assimilation success when possible. This analysis was not linear, but iterative and recursive, continuing until I had a clear picture of the emerging results of this study.

### 3.5 Research quality

When using real-life data, results are usually less predictable and controllable (Ellram, 1996). Hence, it is important to evaluate the quality of research in some level throughout the process (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009). Usually, when discussing about the quality of research, it refers to reliability and validity of the study, and when these are considered from the beginning, one can improve the quality significantly (Koskinen et al., 2005). According to Saunders et al. (2009), reliability refers to the extent to which data collection or analysis process will produce consistent findings, while validity concerns “with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about” (p. 157). To improve the overall trustworthiness of this thesis, the framework of Lincoln and Guba (1985) is being utilized, consisting of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

Credibility (oftentimes-named validity) means that trustworthy findings are produced, and that these findings can be ensured by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. The latter can be achieved by using different data collection modes or different designs. In addition, peer debriefing is also useful to improve the study’s credibility, making sure that the researcher is fully aware of the position and the process of the research. This also helps to clear the researcher’s mind of emotions and feelings that may blur good judgement or seeing the next steps. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) In this thesis, the data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and field observation (observer as participant) which complemented each other (e.g. provided triangulation) and provided a broader understanding of the research context and informants’ experiences and interpretations, than would have been able with a single data collection method. Furthermore, to improve the credibility of the findings, both the research method and data analysis process were followed pre-defined standards and has been described in detail to enable replication. In addition, as this thesis was conducted as part of a wider project, the Project Manager often acted as a peer reviewer throughout the process by criticizing, questioning and ideating to improve the quality of this study.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to another context, depending on the similarity between earlier and later contexts (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). Transferability can also be improved by providing a broad description of the research so that the reader can try to transfer the study to some other context (Koskinen et al., 2005). This thesis relies on existing literature and findings presented in the literature review. Similarities can be found in findings and in the analysis process, indicating some degree of transferability. In addition, the research has been described broadly and openly. However, it is still worth to mention that this research is context specific, which arguably limits the transferability of this study directly to other contexts.

Confirmability means that the interpretations made based on the collected data are supported by other studies focused on the same phenomenon. In addition, the findings and the analysis process is described in detail, so that the readers can easily follow these. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009) The data analysis process and the findings of this thesis have been described in detail; the former above, and the latter in the following section. Furthermore, the findings are grounded in the data, and direct quotes from the interviewees are presented when considered to provide illustrative examples of the phenomenon at hand. In addition, the findings of this research are similar to those studies from the same field, and although some are new, they do not directly contradict previous research.

Dependability in Lincoln and Guba's framework is oftentimes elsewhere referred to as reliability. Dependability refers to the quality of measurement, or more broadly, to the "repeatability" or "consistency" of research measures and procedures. When simplified, a study cannot have credibility (validity) without dependability (reliability). In this study, similar procedures and framings of questions were taken in each interview to ensure consistency in methodology. Secondly, another way to ensure dependability is to use stepwise replication where two or more persons deal with data sources separately and independently. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) As mentioned earlier, this study and data collection were part of a larger academic project. Hence, to ensure unified interpretations among the project team, part of the data coding was done together but separately with the Project Manager, after which comparisons and discussion took place, followed by additional coding. This is comparable with a stepwise replication process.

## 4 Findings

This section introduces the main research findings of this study, by providing interpretations and examples from the interviews and observations made onsite in Romania as well as in Finland. The research section provides various narratives of the experiences of both newcomers and insiders during the assimilation process.

### 4.1 From local to global R&D

Until now, the software R&D department of the case company had only been in Finland. However, as the market has grown and due to the difficulties of finding enough software developers from Finland, the company decided to expand to Romania where developers could be recruited more easily, and as a result, the R&D became a global unit. In sum, the struggles which emerged related to this globalization were related to collaboration ways (e.g. forgetting the existence of the other site), and the ways to communicate and share information (e.g. not remembering to communicate important decisions and changes to others).

During the interviews, it was highlighted that the management assured the insiders about the possibilities the new Romanian office provides for the company. Despite this, as Insider H described it, every time changes are made, "...the first thing that comes to mind is what will happen to me and to my role in the company". Based on the discussions with the management, the goal is not to build a contractor office in Romania but to have the newcomers on the same level with their own responsibilities, though, the R&D management will remain in Finland. Therefore, according to the management, the company is simply growing, and nothing is removed or replaced by the Romanians, but despite this, insiders seemed afraid of losing their own position.

Hence, the R&D employees in Finland are expected to begin collaborating with people in Romania as well as to communicate with them and share information openly and more than what they may have been used to do even locally. In addition, the interviewees – mostly newcomers – pointed out that decisions cannot be made or agreed among the local team only, as the other site has to be involved, or at least, decisions should be communicated to others clearly. For example, according to the newcomers, lot of decisions were made in Finland without any discussions with the newcomers, creating feelings of mistrust and frustration. The project management also encourage to have prior discussions in the formal communication tools so all team members from both sites are aware and involved, which is

also something new for the Finnish employees. At the same time, the Romanians may be more used to using communication tools, than the Finnish workers, as many of the new developers had been working in different contractor companies where communication to other locations over technology had been part of their daily work. Both insiders and newcomers described how problems occurred as a natural part of the software R&D department learning process, when the original R&D team adjusted to their new situation:

*“It might be difficult in the beginning because, before, we had this one development office. The development has been done here all the time. Now, there will be two sites and it adds some difficulties.” (Insider B)*

*“Maybe they were used to talk to each other but now they have to learn that there are some other guys on the other part of the planet, and they need to communicate with them also.” (Newcomer J)*

Furthermore, it was highlighted during the interviews, how easy it is to forget the existence of the other site, which in turn may create problems. According to Newcomer I when a new colleague (Newcomer P) joined the team, the Finnish colleagues did not include Newcomer P into the meetings or discussions, as they never had met her personally. This same Newcomer P also told how some of the Finnish colleagues forgot to participate in a Skype meeting with her as her colleague Newcomer I was on holiday, suspecting that the others forgot that she was also on that call. On the other hand, one insider also described a similar experience when the Finnish site had forgotten to open the online connection to Romania during a planning meeting, leaving the Romanians to wait for tens of minutes before someone realized that they were not online. However, as the insiders speculated, the Finnish R&D site is still learning what it means and requires having team members in other locations, as mentioned above.

On the other hand, learning and empathizing is also required from the Romanians. In the beginning, as the newcomers did not know the other R&D members from the Finnish site, this put a lot of pressure on the mentors and other key project members. This was sometimes forgotten by the newcomers, as they failed to remember that they had joined an existing project where the other site already had established responsibilities. Therefore, according to some newcomers, the Finnish team is not the only one to be accused for the communication difficulties:

*“We still have this issue of communication. But I have to say it’s not only coming from their side [Finland]. I think maybe they’re solemnly to blame. We also have some contribution in this... I feel like when we noticed that they don’t communicate as much, we also started, without even realizing, to do the same, in a way... But it’s just that people are not really used to working like that.” (Newcomer B)*

However, since the teams are currently working with the same project, a lot of communication and collaboration would be required in practice. According to one insider, they interact with the Romanians on a daily basis, sometimes even hourly. It was clear that he considered interaction to take place too often. On the other hand, several Romanians thought in line with the following newcomer that:

*“It’s a given when you work as a software developer... you have to respect these things. You have to collaborate, you have to share information, you have to help your team, learn from your team mates and not just the team but anyone in the company.” (Newcomer D)*

However, it was mentioned during several interviews that sometimes the teams did not know that their work overlapped and were interdependent, hence affecting the others’ work as well. Hence, unnecessary work was oftentimes required to investigate occurring blockers when it could have been prevented with proper communication. Furthermore, it was said that people did not always understand what occurring problems meant for other co-workers. As one insider argued, “if something happens, negative, it will come to us here, in Finland, first... so people here will be affected more with the negative things than in Romania, but they don’t know about this” (Insider J). In reality, however, sometimes small problems at the Finnish site escalated into big problems at the Romanian site. And because of lacking the overall picture and not understanding the other site, the newcomers were eagerly raising their blocks to everyone’s attention without realizing what it meant at the other site, which sometimes the Finnish site had a hard time understanding. On the other hand, the newcomers were also empathized, as one insider put it:

*“One should be there [in Romania] when something like this happens that what it really means there and how bad blocker it actually creates them. Or when someone posts something in Teams and nobody answers so does it feel that they have been forgotten and people in here doesn’t care what is happening.” (Insider I)*

Furthermore, as the Finnish R&D team was not used to work in collaboration with other sites, newcomers felt that lot of decisions were made within the local team and were forgotten to be shared with them. Even in case of big development changes, it was clearly frustrating for the newcomers, as they might not always receive any information beforehand, nor be involved in decision-making, though, this was empathized by the insiders afterwards.

*“Sometimes when some big changes are being implemented, people might only remember to inform their local team if even them. So, we have had situations when the new site has not received information on time, causing blockers that prevent working.” (Insider G)*

However, this made the newcomers to feel less accepted and integrated to the R&D. During the interviews, it was clearly stated how important it was for the newcomers to

understand these decisions and the reasons behind them even if they had not been involved in the decision-making process. This frustrated the newcomers even more as they were hoping to gain more responsibilities and decision-power for themselves rather than being guided and managed by the Finnish colleagues, after all, they had chosen to apply to their new job because it was promised to be different from contractor or outsourcing roles. As a consequence of previously occurred communication conflicts, both sites learned to be very careful when communicating with the other site to avoid causing this kind of problems again. According to one insider, he is trying to remember to always inform the Romanians beforehand when changes take place, explaining what the changes mean in practice and what problems might occur afterwards. However, not all insiders were this accommodative of newcomers' needs.

As a result of lack of communication, as one insider said, negative effects on productivity and work satisfaction were likely to follow, which is why it would be important for the teams to understand that they are part of the same global software R&D department rather than being at opposite ends. To promote this, the management tried to emphasize how everyone should discuss problems with their real names or task-related terms rather than blaming the other site through the use of national labels.

*"We should discuss problems with their real names. For example, if we have problems with continuous integration then we problems with that system... Or, if you are having problems with product management, then you are having problems with that instead of having problems with Finland or Romania. And, I've had to remind the teams about this... I might have to forbid the use of "Finland" and "Romania" terms." (Insider A)*

This idea was also supported by the newcomers and they understood that problems and conflicts could hinder collaboration if not handled properly. For example, Newcomer G suggested that "maybe the company should focus more on facilitating the communication between the teams... I think if you know who you're talking with, I think it's easier to communicate." Interestingly, it seemed like this view continued to exist after the Romanians had visited Finland to get to know the R&D insiders. Many suggested that more face-to-face time could help to solve communication issues when people would meet others personally, resulting in more empathy between them. Furthermore, the management proposed to find a common approach to share information via different communication tools to promote communication between the teams as it was acknowledged that the previous ways of working relying heavily on personal contacts were not feasible anymore.

In sum, it was evident that the Finnish R&D site was still thinking and acting quite locally, although there was a strong need for them to move towards more global

communication and collaboration practices to accommodate the assimilation of distant newcomers.

## 4.2 Fit – what the different parties were looking for

During the anticipatory stage, all the activities take place prior to newcomers join the new company. Here, the case company's job interviews consisted of two parts. The first part focused on the technical competencies aiming to analyze the technical skills of the potential newcomers as well as how they would react in different situations. The other part was a behavioral part, focusing on finding a person who would match the company values. This was seen as particularly important, since a completely new office was being established, as Insider E explained: "Of course, the first ones are very important as they are the ones who build the culture in the new site, so they had to be a good match with our culture." On the other hand, newcomers too understood the reasons why the company presented the values to them, and emphasized their importance during the interviews:

*"I understood that in order to work for this company, you have to have certain values and I mean here, for example, to place the customer at very high importance on your scale and then to take your work seriously." (Newcomer G)*

In other words, the newcomers seemed to have a high person-organizational fit from the start. The motivations to join the case company were also discussed briefly during the interviews. Based on several newcomers, the possibility to develop an own product instead of working in a contractor company was found to be a big motivational factor. It was seen as an opportunity to have more freedom to influence, to have more long-term goals, a different way to collaborate with the clients and colleagues than previously. In addition, the newcomers appreciated the fact that it was an opportunity to work in a new business industry as well as in a brand-new team: "I wanted to see what it's like to be one of the founding members" (Newcomer S). Furthermore, it was said that the integration is easier when you are involved from the start instead of joining a team or a company after it has been active for years.

## 4.3 Orientation program & newcomer experiences

After entering the company, the newcomers started their orientation period to be integrated into the company and its culture. In this study, the case company has a common new hire orientation training for all of its new hires, including many mandatory trainings consisting of general, company-specific and technical topics as well as documentation to be read.

**Purpose of the orientation.** The purpose of the new hire orientation was clearly understood among the newcomers, and themes like getting to know the company, the business, the processes, the culture and the ways of working were highlighted in the interviews. It was mentioned that the newcomers were provided information about the orientation process beforehand together with a rough schedule. For most newcomers, this new hire orientation was followed immediately by a longer orientation period in Finland (first newcomers stayed a month, and second round newcomers two weeks).

To summarize the purpose of both orientation periods (new hire and visit in Finland) and the reasons why the first newcomers had their orientation in Finland:

- to get an overview of the business and the company
- to meet people
- to learn the ways of working (e.g. Scrum)
- to get familiar with the process and common tools
- to learn about the company culture, values and behaviors
- to find out those practices to be implemented in the new office
- to get accustomed to do business with clients
- to get knowledge regarding the product

As mentioned, the newcomers joined the company at different times. Most of the newcomers joined during the spring 2017 before the new office was established, so they were brought to Finland for their orientation period before going back to Romania. The assumption was that there are cultural differences between Finland and Romania, for example, the latter is more hierarchical. Hence, as explained by the management, the idea behind the first newcomers going through a much longer orientation period than usual was that they would adapt to the Finnish culture and ways of working. However, as one newcomer pointed out, these cultural differences might not be that obvious anymore, especially when talking about IT and software development industry.

*“We did have that cultural difference workshop, and it came out that Romania is highly hierarchical, which is not exactly true for the IT business because Agile changed all that.” (Newcomer I)*

Some of the newcomers even felt a bit defended by the cultural differences pointed out.

**Content of the orientation.** The long orientation period and its relevancy were also highlighted in the interviews as something negative when talking about newcomers' experiences. Based on the interviews, there were frustrations among the newcomers, due to



the length of the orientation period, and many of them suggested to have a maximum of two-week orientation period. In addition to the length of orientation, the amount of trainings and their relevancy to the newcomers caused frustration. They were seen as something mandatory that the company has to organize for the newcomers to follow their protocols. The company justified the orientation content with the regulations coming from the industry but also with their quality process: “Due to our quality process, we need to have evidences that new employees are trained” (Insider D). Furthermore, it was also questioned whether the onsite training is the best option for lecture type of content, when technologies are available that would enable online learning in the newcomer’s own pace. As the interviewees pointed out:

*“I enjoyed my time in Finland, don’t get me wrong, I would go there again. But if I’m being honest, I think it was too much. I think it’s too much to go there at the beginning for one month. There were many trainings, but I think that for those trainings maybe some of them could have been done here. Or maybe it’s more efficient to just send a person here to do the training or, I don’t know, through Skype call or stuff like that.” (Newcomer B)*

*“From what I take it, all the employees have to go through those trainings. They have to sign that they took part in these trainings... But from all those days, I think just two or three meetings were really important for us. Don’t get me wrong, I learned a bit or something from each training but it’s not that important for software developer... It’s kind of regulated so we needed that. But it could have been achieved, certainly not of the same quality, but it could have been achieved if they would have filmed those meetings and maybe just have your new hires watch those.” (Newcomer D)*

Lots of tools and different technologies were also introduced to the newcomers, which were not necessarily useful to them. There were also lot of documentation available and provided to the newcomers but as was mentioned in the interviews, not all documentation was up to date, nor did the newcomers have the time to read all of them during their stay. As Newcomer D stated: “They don’t put enough free times in our schedule for us to actually read that... I’m just going to check, yes, I’ve read it.”

Furthermore, the learning by doing approach was also criticized as some of the newcomers who were doing their orientation period in Finland were allocated to different projects to learn products and technologies that were not relevant for them afterwards. Hence, those newcomers had to start their orientation and learning from the beginning when they returned to Romania. On the other hand, some viewed this division in a more positive light. Especially those who started working with the right product from the start pointed out that because others were integrated into different teams, the new teams in Romania accumulated knowledge from multiple projects.

In terms of language use, most newcomers told that their Finnish team members spoke only English when they were around, which gave everyone an equal opportunity to participate in discussions. Surprisingly though, few of the newcomers pointed out that they felt as outsiders in their orientation teams as the team members did not use common language or did not even switch to a common language when the newcomers joined the discussions, or as they did not talk to the newcomers at all. As described by Newcomer N, he had hoped and expected that a common language would be used in the office:

*“Well, the thing is that most of the discussions are in Finnish and there is a language barrier... I was expecting that pretty much the direct communication during the working hour will happen in a common language, but it is not happening.”*

According to the organizational insiders, the interactions with the newcomers were not encouraged by the company in any ways, but it was mostly up to themselves to be proactive and socialize with the new hires. One of the insiders (Insider D) admitted: “There weren't any facilitations, sessions or meetings, instead if you happened to be there you got introduced [to the newcomers] but if not, then no.” So, some felt like they were responsive and tried to interact with the newcomers as much as possible, while noticing that others did not seek further interactions after introductions were made as they concentrated on their own work only. This might be a sign of insiders not being comfortable in discussing with foreign language, or, that they felt threatened by the newcomers who are suspected to take their jobs, which was pointed out during the interviews.

**Timing of the orientation.** The timing of the orientation period was also discussed during the interviews. Based on the interviews, it is clear that some kind of orientation is welcome among the newcomers but when this should take place, was not clear. However, most of the newcomers who had their orientation during the first weeks after joining the company preferred that, while others preferred to read something beforehand so not all of the things would be new when taking the orientation trainings. The latter option was also seen as beneficial to gain an understanding of the business and product before starting to work with real tasks. In contrast, those newcomers who had their orientation after a month or so criticized their timing because they had already started working with real tasks and knew a lot about the product and the company. Hence, the trainings were only seen as something mandatory to participate in but did not provide any new information to them. For example, one newcomer pointed out how he joined the company during a vacation period so there were not that much insiders present to guide his work, and therefore, he had the formal orientation trainings after he had already started working with the project.

**Resocialization.** For the Finnish team members, there were no resocialization activities or re-trainings, though, working and collaborating in a distributed environment as well as communicating over technology, for example, were new ways of working for many of them. Hence, as the insiders' work setting changed notably, they might have had the need for resocialization activities to learn the new skills necessary for their work, and to be integrated into the "new" global software R&D department. However, only a cultural difference workshop was offered but it was seen as unnecessary among insiders and it was cancelled because of this.

## 4.4 Face-to-face activities

In line with previous research, face-to-face activities are expected to help the newcomers to adapt to the common work practices and organizational culture. Summarizing the perspectives of newcomers, which are elaborated further in the following sections, face-to-face activities were found to be important and useful for:

- meeting people for the first time
- information seeking from colleagues working in the same location
- informal social activities improving the team building
- keeping collaboration and communication as smooth as possible
- solving conflicts and improving trust between the different sites

### 4.4.1 Site visits

Based on the interviews, site visits were found to have many positive effects. According to the newcomers, it would have been much harder for them to start working in Romania from scratch if they would not have known anyone or anything about the company and the ways or working beforehand. Their visit in Finland provided them with valuable insights on how the team in Finland are working and how the Romanian teams are expected to work when going back. As Newcomer F said, when describing the usefulness of the site visits "to know the people from here [Finland], [to see] how teams are working, to give us general idea how our team should be, how we should work there in order to fill the needs of the business."

Site visits also provided the possibility to meet people in person, which was found to be important for future communication and collaboration. For example, management emphasized the benefits, as they believed that insiders meeting the newcomers was a good way for them to understand that the newcomers are not taking their jobs but rather are part of the whole team. In addition, site visits were also found to be important to keep

communication flowing between Finland and Romania, as the newcomers learned who to contact in case in need of help. Those newcomers who did not visit the team in Finland during their orientation period felt that it would have been very useful to meet the team from the other site and to form some kind of relationship with them from the start to ease the communication via different communication tools. Now, they felt that they “just appeared out of nowhere” as Newcomer S described it, which made it difficult to communicate with others over the internet.

*“Was interesting to see the whole picture of company... And being [in Finland] and seeing the other people, seeing how they worked, it's create more empathy or usually you don't see this kind of structure. If you can't picture the situation there, you tend to ignore more stuff.” (Newcomer H)*

*“I think that would have helped more if I got to know them from the beginning. I hope I will get to visit there [Finland] and know them. And obviously when you jump right in to the middle of the project and you are new, of course all the discussions were involving my co-worker and not myself which is fine but at some point, you start feeling invisible.” (Newcomer P)*

Experience sharing as well as learning were also found to be good reasons for the site visits. According to the insiders, the first orientation was organized in Finland just to make sure the newcomers learned as much as possible, especially when it comes to sharing tacit knowledge, instead of relying on a couple of key persons to travel to Romania and teach the newcomers there. This was also found to be a useful solution when talking about building an organizational culture to the new site and transferring the company culture there. When the newcomers had their orientation in Finland, the insiders could emphasize the good things and avoid the bad examples to make sure the newcomers would not make the same mistakes in Romania. Hence, the insiders felt that the first newcomers were very valuable as they were seen as the ones who would build the culture in Romania and bring the best practices with them from Finland. This is too why the fit between the company's and persons' personal values were emphasized during the job interviews, to ease with the transfer. However, the insiders acknowledged that the culture might not be exactly the same as every country has their own local culture which may affect but the common company culture should still be the starting point. On the other hand, the newcomers were confident to successfully transfer and build the culture to the new site as the common processes and the ways of working were similar to all sites and familiar to most of the newcomers from their previous workplaces.

*“I think many companies have the same goals. Everyone wants to satisfy the customer and to improve themselves and to collaborate. So, it's not something new for us. There's no new ground-breaking values that we have to figure out from scratch. There are things that we already have I think embedded in our practices somehow. I don't*

*think it's going be that much of a challenge to embrace the company culture. And I think it will help that we are self-organizing... There's definitely a learning curve. But I think it's a goal that's definitely not impossible to reach or anything. I think it's doable." (Newcomer B)*

#### 4.4.2 Face-to-face discussions

Face-to-face discussions were used when the Romanians and the team in Finland were trying to settle a common approach, as there were some differences in the ways of working between the two sites. In addition, both insiders and newcomers found face-to-face discussions valuable during conflict situations. For example, as one newcomer described, they had some miscommunication and misunderstandings in the beginning, e.g. about why some of their outputs had been rejected without explanations. This was resolved, however, when a couple of the insiders travelled to Romania and sorted out things face-to-face instead of using online communication tools. One insider commented on the situation:

*"The situation was culminated so badly that we had to go there and discuss things personally since email simply didn't work in this case. We had to discuss with people and talk about these problems. And we had direct and thorough discussions... and we explained what we're expecting... We also presented a schedule to show them what they can expect from the near future regarding ownership and responsibilities." (Insider D)*

Hence, when a crisis occurs, face-to-face discussions might be absolutely necessary to clear things up. However, in this case, since the newcomers that were affected already had complained to their colleagues, they too were inflated by negative feelings, causing a more long-lasting schism between the two sites.

Face-to-face discussions were also thought to be more efficient than online communication. According to the newcomers, it is much easier to collaborate and discuss with others in the same office rather than via online communication tools as one cannot interpret others that well over online messages, compared to discussions that take place face-to-face that contains non-verbal cues.

The insiders also emphasized the importance of face-to-face discussions, which is why management decided to create separate co-located teams in Romania rather than having mixed teams across the sites (note however that the Romanian site still was led under a Finnish architect and business-oriented senior leader (business owner). But as a result of this separation, the insiders worried about that the Romanians would keep up with the work and current changes as the product management is very Power Point-oriented, and lot of discussions, clarification and decision-making happen informally in the hallways instead of in common communication channels.

*“Information-sharing and communication are difficult elsewhere in the company as well, for example, if someone is working remotely at that moment, since these oftentimes happen mostly in hallways. So, we would need clear and common approach how to share knowledge via email, etc.” (Insider F)*

#### 4.4.3 Information-seeking

Based on the categorization introduced earlier in the literature review, the following tactics that newcomers used to seek information, i.e. overt asking, observations, learning by doing –approach and feedback, are discussed below:

**Overt asking.** Most newcomers preferred to first ask help from their local team members as it was found to be the most inconvenient way as one could just walk to another colleague and ask help instead of asking and waiting for an answer from someone online. Only if local colleagues could not help, newcomers contacted insiders with different communication tools. Furthermore, the newcomers also identified reasons to ask for help, which in most cases related to technical information. As one of the newcomers described, the newcomers did not know all the technical details, nor did they have a clear overview of the product in the beginning, leading them to ask lot of questions related to these topics from the insiders. The newcomers used different information seeking strategies depending on the problem at hand, and they highlighted the importance of being proactive themselves to seek help whenever they needed it. According to Newcomer R, he asks for help directly “when it’s something that should be fixed easily.” However, according to Insider G:

*“They [newcomers] are asking similar questions so if they find out something, they should share that information across their local team, so we don't need to tell the same thing for all of them separately which would also broaden their knowledge base faster.”*

**Observing.** In addition to the above mentioned, co-location also provided the opportunity to observe others’ behaviors, in addition to asking directly. Observing activities were used when newcomers wanted to gain information from the ways of working, and how the new teams were expected to work and collaborate. When first interviewed, the ones that had their orientation in Finland, emphasized that they should take in and observe as much as possible to be able to start working independently in Romania, which should be according to the company’s common approach and ways of working. In line with this Newcomer I, used observations to “watch [the insiders], how they interact with each other, and to get a sense of how they work so we kind of get the sense of how we should work.”

**Learning by doing.** The newcomers also exercised their lessons learned in practice to deepen their knowledge. According to the newcomers, they should also practice what they

have learned to really understand it. As Newcomer G put it, by “just reading something doesn’t mean you learn it... you have to exercise it.” Hence, the newcomers were allocated in different Scrum teams to learn different products, processes and technical stuff in practice, as Newcomer L told during the interviews: “We were integrated to one Scrum team and we started to attend Scrum meetings and other meetings and they gave some real tasks that we are working on.” Similarly, the insiders emphasized the importance of onsite orientation and the learning by doing approach to transfer tacit knowledge as, for example, the way the company follows some general project management methods might not be “by the book”.

**Feedback.** To get forward and start to work independently, the newcomers highlighted the importance of getting feedback from their colleagues. According to them, one cannot get better and improve oneself without feedback. Colleagues were found to be the number one source for feedback, and not just, because the colleagues are the ones who accept or reject their work during the code review. Feedback was found to be an important way to feel appreciated by others which also was seen as improving work motivation and the sense of being important part of the team: “It’s good when you know you’re appreciated by your other colleagues for what you’re doing, and it really motivates you” (Newcomer L).

#### 4.4.4 Mentoring

To support the newcomers’ learning and to ease their information seeking attempts, the first newcomers had formal mentors appointed by the company as they started their orientation period in Finland. These mentors were responsible of the newcomers’ introductions and acted as their main point-of-contact in the beginning. For those newcomers who joined later on and had their orientation in Romania a formal mentor was not offered, but rather, the other onsite co-workers acted as informal mentors. Both formal and informal mentors were appreciated by the newcomers as they received help from them. The mentors were also valued as they helped the newcomers to find and contact the right people. According to one insider this help is always needed, whenever a new employee joins the company as the newcomer cannot remember who is doing what and who to contact when needed.

In addition to the above mentioned, other responsibilities of formal mentors included to share knowledge and information, to coach the newcomers forward instead of telling them to do something, and to help the newcomers with practical things like setting up their working environments. According to the formal mentors interviewed, their role in this case felt much easier compared to other times they had trained a team, as the Romanians were very active, self-organized and learned a lot by themselves. However, sometimes the

newcomers felt that the provided information was too organization-driven. Hence, some newcomers felt that other information was left out if it was not related to the work or product directly. For example, newcomers told that they knew whom to contact with different technical questions but did not know whom to contact if their email did not work or if they would have issues with their salaries. In other words, the newcomers felt that the company highlighted only the information that was central, necessary and important for their upcoming tasks, and only hinted where additional information could be found if needed.

Informal mentors also performed similar tasks as formal mentors as they showed the newcomers what to read and learn before performing actual tasks. They also supported the newcomers when they started to explore the product in development and they also shared their experiences which helped newcomers to assimilate, as one newcomer told during the interviews. In addition, the newcomers had the opportunity to shadow their co-workers in meetings to learn their tasks if they were having similar responsibilities as the informal mentors.

Insiders who were assigned to be formal mentors to newcomers felt that they had a lot work to do as they had their daily work in addition to mentoring and helping the newcomers. Hence, during the interviews, some frustration could be seen from the insiders when talking about supporting and helping newcomers by answering their questions and showing them important things. They perceived it stressful to have responsibility over newcomers' learning at the same time, as their everyday tasks should be completed on the side. For example, as Insider J described it: "At that time, to get new people and to spend time with them to teach them, it's really hard. So, you have to do your work, and at the same time, you have to support them." The formal mentors also felt that their success in mentoring was really hard to assess, and as one formal mentor mentioned, they could have received some proof by knowing how well the newcomers work in Romania and follow common processes. After starting in Romania, a few of the mentors had regular site visits to Romania which helped the newcomers to learn more about the common practices and to feel connected with the Finnish team.

#### 4.4.5 Social activities

According to the newcomers, different informal activities also helped newcomers to get to know people, which made communication easier. It was mentioned that after they had the chance to discuss with people outside of the office and about other things than work, deeper relationships were build. It was therefore seen important to socialize with the others outside



of work to get to know each other not just as co-workers. However, the newcomers mostly socialized amongst each other, also during their Finland visit, as there were not any planned activities for the whole software R&D department that would have involved both the insiders and the newcomers. Especially, during the onsite orientation in Finland, the newcomers felt that they were able to strengthen the relationships with each other as well as to form a coherent team when they had the opportunity to socialize outside of working hours as well, while being away from home.

Furthermore, the newcomers continued to have informal activities in Romania as well which in fact became an important part of their office culture. According to the newcomers, they do something together almost once a week, and this was found to improve their communication and collaboration as they had established strong relationships with each other. However, the newcomers also hoped that the company would organize and facilitate some kind of team building activities maybe once a year that would include the whole software R&D department to have the opportunity to really get to know people from the other sites as well.

## 4.5 Virtual activities

In this section, the focus is on the role of different virtual communication channels on newcomer assimilation, and how these channels are being used in the daily work of the distributed software R&D department. Different ways to seek information are also discussed. However, those systems used in the actual performing work are excluded from this study's scope as usually these are not affecting the collaboration and assimilation process and cannot be changed to ensure better assimilation.

**Communication tools.** In the case company, the most important asynchronous and synchronous communication tools that are being used includes email, Microsoft Teams (Teams), Skype for Business (Skype). The most important features of these tools highlighted during the interviews were the traceability and the transparent nature of messages. Based on the interviews, email was used when communicating more formal matters, while Teams and Skype were used for more informal and ad hoc issues. Skype was used mostly in one-on-one discussions and team meetings, while in Teams, the software R&D department had different channels for different topics where all could participate. According to one insider, the idea with Teams is that everyone gets informed and sees what is being discussed, and hence, one does not need to worry about whether the information reaches others or not. They had, for example, a general channel in which general matters are usually being discussed

such as what is going to happen next week as well as a channel to post notifications if problems are identified which need to be solved by someone. However, in Teams, because of the technical features of the tool, if the question or comment is not assigned to a specific person directly (i.e. through a tag), the tool does not send notifications to participants. This troubled several newcomers and made them worry about messages getting through or not, and as a result, they commonly preferred to use Skype or email instead.

**Information seeking & sharing.** When talking about how these different communication tools are being used, one newcomer described that Teams is mostly used when a person does not know who to contact or when a person wants to discuss with everyone or many participants, for example, to share a spotted problem or solution that everyone should be aware of. On the other hand, Skype is used when talking with one or two people, for instance when help is needed from a particular person. It was also mentioned that usually, after newcomers contact a person directly via Skype, and if that person is not online, they would send an email and wait to get an answer afterwards. However, as mentioned earlier, the local team is usually consulted first before using communication tools to contact distant site members. For example, if something could be solved and decided among the local team, a verbal presentation was done to the team, and if not, it was communicated to the other teams for further investigations.

From the interviews, it could be seen that the Romanian teams had already common ways to communicate and to use the different tools, and the use of these tools was related to the importance or type of the matter. Skype was for instance usually used when more serious issues were discussed, that requires back and forth communication. In addition to seeking help from other colleagues via different communication tools, different wiki pages and the company's intranet were also used, providing a lot of different documentations and information. However, not all of these documents were updated regularly, which could cause misunderstandings and confusions. While the colleagues were contacted directly to gain more product-related information, these information sources were used for gaining technical information or when information about the company's employees was needed, in other words, when one does not know exactly who to contact.

**Identified problems.** The technical features of the communication tools or the ways people were communicating via them also caused problems for newcomers' assimilation. For example, as mentioned, in Teams, notifications are nonexistent if no one is tagged. According to one newcomer, it is frustrating to not receive any answer or having to wait a long time for an answer to important questions. In addition, not everyone might answer

questions directed to everyone, leaving the questioner unsure whether anyone had received their message. Furthermore, newcomers and insiders perceived waiting times for getting an answer very differently. According to newcomers, they felt that they waited a very long time and sometimes this blocked them from continuing their work, while the insiders felt that newcomers had to wait only for a few hours.

*“Sometimes it happens and it’s understandable that if you ask something, people might not always pay attention to Skype, for example. So, your answers may come a little later because of that.” (Newcomer S)*

*“Of course, a watched pot never boils. So, if they [newcomers] do not receive their answer in couple of hours they start to ask when they will receive the answer.” (Insider D)*

The way people use different channels, was also seen to cause problems as different people preferred to use different channels. Several newcomers mentioned that for some, the main channel was email, while others preferred direct contacts with phone or Skype, causing lot of frustrations. According to one newcomer, to learn to contact people with the suitable tool has been part of their informal practical learning since it depended from person to person which channel was the most effective when seeking help, for example. As Newcomer P simply put it: “I hope that at some point we get to use a common approach.”

Both the newcomers and insiders highlighted the difficulties of interpreting messages when using only online communication tools. According to one newcomer, when communicating via technology, one cannot really give meaning to messages as the message is usually only in written form. In other words, he felt that communication was hard when you cannot see the other person and his or her non-verbal messages like hand motions and tone of voice. This was supported by the insiders as well, as they felt that sometimes it was hard to explain things in written. During the summer holiday period, there was a case when one insider was required to communicate the newcomers what was needed from them and did it in very efficient-fashion which was then misinterpreted by the newcomers as rudeness.

According to one insider, problems also occurred in the beginning, as newcomers did not know enough people to contact, hence, they contacted only those few who they knew from the Finnish team, putting a lot of pressure on these persons. In the end, these persons became bottlenecks because they had to do their daily work in addition to answering the questions, as mentioned earlier while discussing mentoring. As one insider put it:

*“It’s really big amount of time I’m spending talking to them [newcomers] and trying to help them during the day but sometimes they just need to simply wait to get my answer, so there can be problems for them to get the answer fast enough and straightforwardly.” (Insider J)*

As a result, newcomers complained, as they were dissatisfied with the way information was shared with them. On the same time, the fact that there is no time difference between the two sites was mentioned as a positive thing, reducing time waiting for answers.

Both sides felt that meeting people in person and having some face-to-face time might help with these problems. The team members would learn to know each other, providing newcomers more possibilities to contact the right people in the right way when help is needed. Face-to-face time would also make it easier to learn others' ways of working, enable them to discuss things that might be less effective via communication tools, and minimize the risk of misunderstandings.

## 4.6 Outcomes of assimilation

Based on the interviews, conclusions of the outcomes of newcomer assimilation can be drawn and are discussed below. First, the expected assimilation timeline and adopting the company values are presented before going deeper into an emerging concept of this study – the assimilation gap. Finally, signs of assimilation success and the factors that supported this are collected together.

### 4.6.1 Assimilation timeline

According to the R&D management, the goal was to have the newcomers on the same level as the existing team after six months, when talking about the level of productivity and ownership. Hence, before that six months, as Insider A put it, “when you have recruited or established a new team, you shouldn't expect high contributions and efficiency”. However, one insider pointed out how he had been working in the company for more than three years and still feeling that he did not know the industry thoroughly. After the first six months, he learned the job like the management estimated, but only after a year, he felt to be productive. On the other hand, as one insider pragmatically put it, the experience and knowledge evolve as time pass:

*“Of course, people learn [the business perspective]. As said, one-year experience comes after one year, and if you have 15 years of experience, then you have probably worked for 15 years. So, it is something that develops all the time.” (Insider F)*

However, when interviewing the newcomers, the assimilation timeline nor the expectations were not clear to everyone. In addition, many of the newest members were unsure about the expectations put on them, and when they were expected to be on the same level as the “older” newcomers, or insiders. All newcomers were however eager to reach that level as soon as possible. The newcomers had understood, though, that they were not

expected to be to fully self-organized and independent in the beginning but rather having a period of trial-and-error to get used to the ways of working and to find the rhythm of their own as a team. However, during the interviews, several newcomers commented that they would have wanted the expectations on them to be clearer. Newcomer B commented:

*“No, it’s not clear for me what their expectances are. But each time we had meetings with them, they really try to make this point that we are doing great, encourage us that we are doing better than they thought we would. So, in a way, they have tried to underline the fact that we are meeting their expectations.” (Newcomer B)*

#### 4.6.2 Understanding the company values

The case company has four common values related to collaboration, the importance of customers and results, and ownership. Notice, that the real names of these values are changed to ensure the anonymity of the case company. Furthermore, the company’s employees are expected to adopt these values when joining the company since they guide the company’s everyday work. It was already discussed earlier under the Chapter 4.2., how the company tried to find new employees who would fit to these values.

Collaboration means that the company encourages its employees to actively work together. According to one newcomer, this means that in practice, you collaborate with your team members as well as with other teams. Many of the newcomers interpreted collaboration as helping others whenever they can and are needed. Hence, collaboration is seen as the most important value as one cannot succeed without any help from the team. For example, as noted by Newcomer G, “working in a team is always better than working on your own”, hence, emphasizing the importance of collaboration. Especially, the communication and information sharing were seen as crucial part of collaboration, but as discussed earlier, in practice, the current distributed project was having problems related to this.

The second value related to the importance of customers, means that the customer is at the center of everything the company does. However, this value cannot easily be linked to the R software R&D department as they are not directly interacting with the end customer, one could see the other employees of the company as their customers. As the insiders described it, for a software developer, the customer could be the Product Owner (PO), in other words, if the PO is happy, then probably the customer is happy, too. This way of thinking was also supported by the newcomers who interpreted the customer as being their colleagues across the company. According to the newcomers, when talking about providing the end customer the best possible products by writing a high-quality code, the colleagues could also be seen as customers who require the best possible help or collaboration.

The importance of results means that the company requires high quality performance from its employees and this performance is being measured. This value was only briefly discussed, as the newcomers seemed to take this value for granted. In other words, according to the newcomers, by following the other values, results and high performance are achieved.

The final value relating to ownership means that everyone should be responsible of his or her own work to contribute and commit to ensure the company success. Based on the interviews, in practice, this means that the person takes responsibility over his or her own tasks. For example, according to the newcomers, to have responsibilities over something means that a person gives his or her best possible effort when working with something. It was also seen as having the courage to come forward and admit when something has gone wrong instead of trying to hide, or in worst case, trying to blame others for that.

However, as the newcomers pointed out, these values are somewhat general in their nature and nothing new to them, as they have used to work according to these kinds of values before. They also highlighted the fact that the values are already embedded in the ways they are currently working, hence, the values are integrated to the methods and processes they are following. According to the newcomers, because of Scrum and Agile, they are automatically collaborating and communicating with others, and are expected to take ownership, as Scrum teams usually are self-managed. Hence, the newcomers were very confident about being able to transfer the company values to the new site, as Newcomer M put it, these values are “exactly what we are doing now”. In addition to those common ways of working, the fact that the company operates in the service field requires the employees to follow these values automatically as one insider framed it:

*“As a service company, our customers value that we deliver high quality solutions, so we have to also be willing to do this. We need to be willing to achieve these goals not only by ourselves but also as part of the team. And we need to be ready to own our contributions.” (Insider E)*

As said above, by using the company values as guiding principles, the newcomers seemed to have adopted those values, hinting about a successful assimilation. However, though the newcomers may have understood the values thoroughly, i.e. the ideal ways of working, they are not assimilated fully since the reality, was in fact somewhat different. Hence, the gap between the ideal ways and the reality have created assimilation gaps, i.e. difference in expectations and behaviors, hindering the newcomers’ successful assimilation.

#### 4.6.3 Assimilation gap 1 – Taking ownership

Related to taking ownership, the majority of newcomers felt frustrated, as they felt that the Finnish team did not trust them to be able to work at the same level with them. Many of the newcomers also thought that this was also one possible reason behind those communication problems discussed earlier, as the newcomers tried to be more independent and not asking help from the other site all the time. As mentioned earlier, the second round of the interviews were conducted when the first newcomers had already worked for approximately six months in the company, being the assimilation landmark that was mentioned above by the insiders. However, most newcomers felt that there still was a lot of micromanagement coming from the Finnish site, making it difficult for them to reach the same level. However, they understood that they need to prove themselves to the Finnish team to gain trust and freedom to work independently. However, as Newcomer P put it: “We don’t know yet what we don’t know... Sometimes we feel that we are ready, and we don’t know why they think we are not.” In other words, the newcomers did not know why the Finnish team thought that they were not ready to work independently and to gain more responsibilities at that time.

Furthermore, the newcomers felt that while they want to gain more responsibilities and ownership, the other site does not want to lose any, as they are not used to share their work or power with other teams. In addition, all the newcomers felt that the insiders had not expected them to wanting ownership so soon. Hence, this was the first assimilation gap (see Figure 6) that occurred while analyzing the collected data. In other words, as the newcomers tried to act according to the value relating to ownership, the insiders did not think they were ready for it, and consequently did not offer them opportunities to take ownership.

*“I suppose they [Finnish team] don’t want to lose ownership, and we want to gain ownership... I get the impression, they expect me to work slowly, just to do the actual tasks that are assigned to me... And that’s the thinking in R&D, that it’s my impression, but it’s quite different from all the nice and beautiful company values and all the training we had during orientation.” (Newcomer D)*

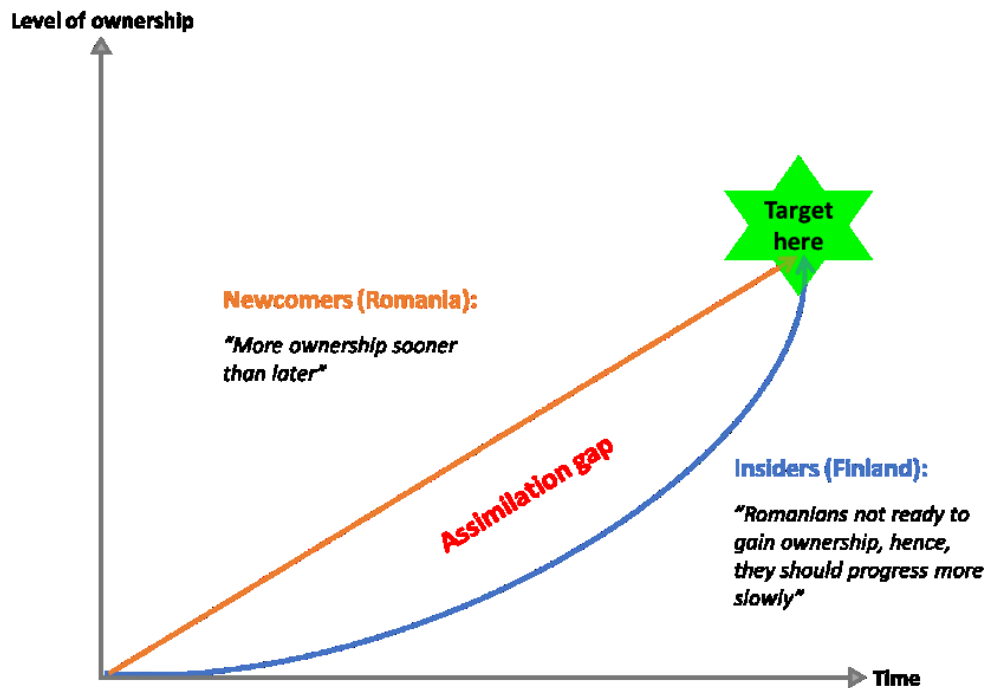


Figure 6. Assimilation gap 1 – Taking ownership.

However, according to the top management in Finland, though the goal is to have the newcomers working on the same level as the other site with similar responsibilities. The reason why this gap visualized in Figure 6 existed related to differences in expectations. From the newcomers' perspective, they expected that they should work according to company values, while from the insiders' perspective, they felt that the newcomers did not understand what ownership meant, as they had a background in contractor companies with little power to make decisions. In other words, the newcomers might be used to perform predesigned tasks rather than thinking about the overall picture while designing the task agenda. Couple of the insiders also stated that the newcomers were treated as contractors since they were acting like contractors, and that taking ownership of the development seemed to be totally new for them, and hence they might not know what taking responsibility means in reality. On the other hand, one insider admitted that the management's expectations should be communicated to the newcomers more clearly that at the moment, the newcomers are expected to gain more knowledge and experiences from the product by performing simpler tasks but in the future, they are given more responsibilities as they grow. This is shown in Figure 6 as the insiders' expectation were lower than the newcomers, i.e. as said, the insiders expected the newcomers to progress more slowly to be able to gain thorough understanding of the product and business.



*“In the beginning, we worked hard for the new team to have everything defined for them. So, they could simply start working, and they started to work very well. But the first difficulties occurred in the summer when we gave more responsibilities and they didn't have everything planned for them. So, they had to start thinking themselves what they are doing, how they are doing it and how it fits to the whole project.” (Insider D)*

However, some of the newcomers also understood that they are not ready to have ownership, as the business was not fully familiar to them. However, while interviewing the newcomers, the motivation to gain more knowledge could clearly be seen. This was also supported by the insiders as they had noticed the same, and the management was already assessing the ways the company could support the newcomers' business learning even more to ensure that they would gain the overall picture as soon as possible. However, as one insider admitted it, sometimes the industry's requirements might be very strict and unusual when it comes to software development, which could make it difficult for the newcomers to understand the product thoroughly. The insiders also explained that because of this lack of overall knowledge, many of the changes the newcomers had suggested were rejected, causing even more frustrations among the newcomers.

Overall, the ownership was seen as an important motivational factor when talking about work commitment. According to one newcomer, by having some ownership, the person is more involved, hence, maybe being more motivated to improve his or her work compared to the situation where no ownership is provided, and problems occur. However, if expectations are not met, the newcomers might start looking for other possibilities outside of the case company. For example, one newcomer described the situation as “extremely frustrating” when he felt that the Finnish team does not trust the Romanians. Furthermore, due to this lack of trust as well as lack of ownership, he felt that he was not able to give his best performance, hence, feeling uncommitted and unmotivated to stay. On the same time, the company itself was however trying to encourage its employees to take more ownership of their work and to feel proud of the things they have done and provides a staff equity plan.

#### 4.6.4 Assimilation gap 2 – Ways of working

Furthermore, the teams' integration was also hindered by the way the newcomers followed the common methods and processes they had been taught during the orientation. Though Agile and Scrum were the company's ways of working helping the newcomers to fit in and transfer the company culture to the new site, the ways in which the teams were following these created the other assimilation gap between the two sites. This second gap related to ways of working is visualized in Figure 7 below. As many of the newcomers had previous

experience from Scrum methods in their previous workplaces, they quickly began to work accordingly. At the same time, the insiders worked according to their own ways, which was a hybrid between scrum and waterfall. As one newcomer described the situation, the Romanians might have more experience from the company's formal ways of working than the insiders, who have created strong informal ones, which resulted in another gap between the two sites.

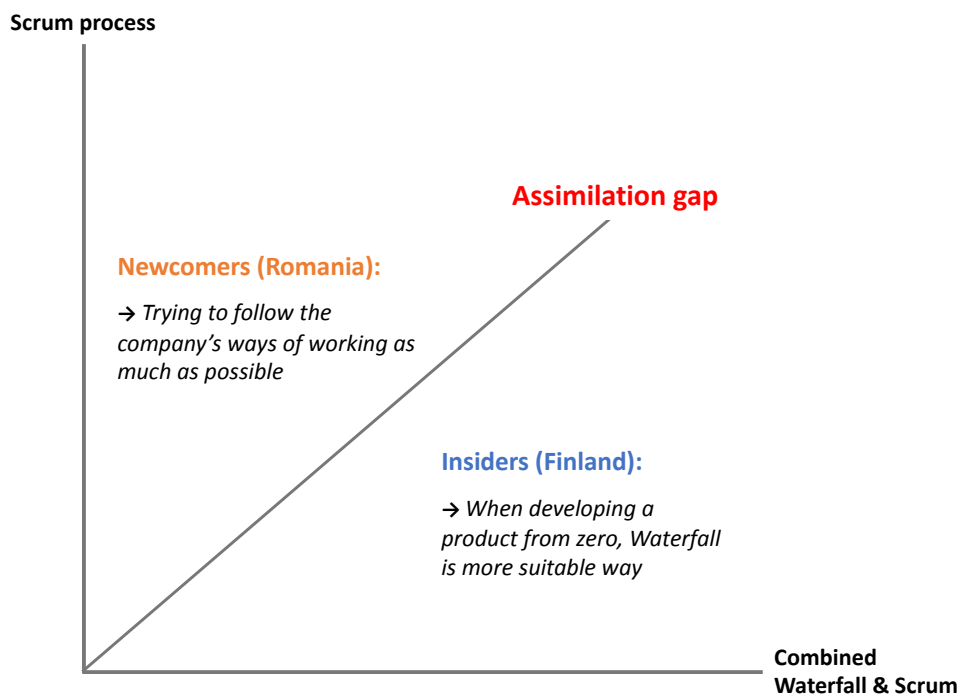


Figure 7. Assimilation gap 2 – Ways of working.

In sum, the newcomers had been taught the ideal ways of working during their orientation and they had adopted these, while the reality, i.e. the way the Finnish team was working was something different. Hence, the newcomers were following formal work practices in a stricter way than the insiders do. According to one newcomer, the newcomers have tried to follow the common ways of working the same way they were presented to them during the orientation. The newcomers felt that the processes should be followed as much as possible and that there should be no exceptions. As Newcomer N put it: “The Scrum process is the same no matter if you are from China, India, US, Romania or Finland... The process is clearly defined.”

In contrast, the insiders felt that the Romanians were following Scrum in a too strict way causing communication problems accelerated with the distance. For example, based on the way the newcomers work, the insiders sometimes felt that it was impossible to involve them in decision making if a decision was needed ad hoc. In addition, the insiders felt that

they were more relaxed when it came to not deliver every planned feature on time, while the newcomers were seen to stress this too much. As one insider proposed, the newcomers should learn to drop features if the schedule does not seem to stick, though, this might not had been communicated to the newcomers this way. Similarly, one insider was pondering if the newcomers were aware of the fact that the project's ways of working was somewhat different from the way the company was operating on paper. Insider A talked about this:

*“Strictly followed Scrum causes problems and many times we have had to remind them. It's really hard to develop a product from zero with Scrum which is why our way of working reminds more of a waterfall.” (Insider A)*

According to the newcomers, this gap caused some confusions among the newcomers, as sometimes they felt like they do not know how they should work as they were taught one way, but the project seemed to work in another way. Hence, this was hindering the newcomers' assimilation, and made them more insecure. On the other hand, the insiders did acknowledge this gap, but did not do anything to remove it. As quoted above, the insiders' approach was more like the Waterfall method when developing a product from zero, hence, which is a totally different approach than the one presented to the newcomers. As one insider described it, the team in Finland had combined some ways of Scrum with Waterfall and was afraid that their unique way of working was not communicated to the newcomers at any point.

#### 4.6.5 Assimilation success

From the interviews, it was evident that differences existed in the ways the two sites perceived the integration rate and assimilation success of newcomers. Based on the interviews and general observations, it seems that currently, the newcomers are assimilated to their local team at a high degree, but to the whole R&D team to a lower degree, though the newcomers expected the teams to be more coherent in the future. In addition, many of the insiders were considering Finland and Romania somewhat separate from each other rather than seeing the software R&D department as a global unit. Despite the assimilation gaps mentioned above, several newcomers reported however that they felt that they had become integrated into the company, and hence, become performing members of the team during the first six to nine months.

Based on the results, the site visit to Finland and all the informal activities with the new colleagues as well as the help and support of formal and informal mentors and other co-workers were the most important factors that helped newcomers to fit in. For example, all those newcomers who had the opportunity to visit Finland emphasized this as a way to

support their successful assimilation when they were able to meet the Finnish team and learn to know the distant team members. The information seeking activities have required newcomers to be more or less proactive to successfully settle in, while sometimes passively observing others' actions also were helpful, such as e.g. during site visits. For the most part, when newcomers were forced to stand on their own legs, the most concrete benefits for assimilation was seen. For example, as mentioned earlier, one newcomer became accepted by the remote team only after her colleague left for a holiday and the others were forced to include her and discuss with her which they continued to do after the colleague came back to work. In other words, all the activities discussed earlier have supported the newcomers' assimilation into the company as can be seen from the few examples below:

*"We didn't know each other very well, we just knew the names when we started our orientation in Finland. We had activities together, and I think that helped us develop some kind of relationship in the beginning." (Newcomer G)*

*"She gave me not only the information about what we are doing and what this is all about, she also shared her stories with me. I think this helped with settling in." (Newcomer P)*

Furthermore, the site visits were seen easing communication through the virtual tools as the distant team members met and learned to know each other and others' communication styles. According to the interviewees, the face-to-face meetings also helped them to be more comfortable in using these tools. The virtual tools also extended newcomers' possibilities to gain information. However, even these possibilities were extended even further after face-to-face time with the Finnish team members, as the newcomers learned to know more people whom to contact instead of relying on few insiders only.

Based on the interviews, the fact that the team was completely new and got "assimilated together" was seen as a huge benefit when talking about integrating into the company. When considering the signs of successful assimilation, many – if not most – of the newcomers outstandingly spoke about "we" referring to them as a team. When one newcomer described the Romanian teams' tradition of going out together almost every week, she noted how "we are spending time together", while another Newcomer G pointed out how "we have started developing this kind of friendship outside work, which is nice." Furthermore, many of the newcomers highlighted the fact how easily they integrated together and how well they started to work together. They also emphasized how good and fast they are in solving conflicts before they flare up, and always together.

There could also be seen signs of successful assimilation when considering the company point-of-view. Again, speaking about "we" when talking about the company is the

most visible sign. According to the newcomers, due to the orientation period in Finland, they felt as part of the company as they learned to know it more. In addition, many newcomers seemed to really care about the product and the company. For example, Newcomer G talked about how “we as a company are represented in the market by our products”, while Newcomer N said: “I really care about the product and the company and the fact that one person has full decision power... without having some peer review or something, I don't think it's right.”

Based on the interviews, it was clear that the company had tried to emphasize the person-organization fit when recruiting the newcomers. The management reported that they were looking for people who would fit with their values as the first newcomers were seen crucial for building the culture to the new distant office. On the other hand, the newcomers also highlighted the importance of fit. They had understood that in order for them to be able to work in the company, they should possess particular values but they should also be able to work in teams, i.e. they were expected to have strong teamwork skills. Therefore, many newcomers emphasized the company values, and how these are visible and guiding their work, which also could be seen as a sign of assimilation success, though, they might have adopted only the ideal ways instead of those real ways of working:

*“We always keep in mind that our final goal is to keep our customers happy, to have them continue using our products, so every move that make, every task and everything is with the end user in mind.” (Newcomer A)*

However, some problems occurred due to the recent change in the organizational insiders' work environment, i.e. as the project became global when the newcomers joined in, the new work environment required the insiders to learn and adopt new work skills. On the other hand, the newcomers were expected to assimilate into this virtual context also but as they already had previous experiences from global project where virtual communication tools were used, the newcomers were confident to be able to assimilate successfully. However, as sometimes the insiders forgot to involve and inform the newcomers, this was seen hindering the newcomers' successful assimilation by causing feelings of mistrust and frustration.

When talking about future expectations, the first assimilation gap – the newcomers wanting to gain more ownership, while the insiders felt that they might not be ready for it – was expected to decrease over time, although they at the moment felt restricted. According to the newcomers, though, they expect to have more responsibilities in the future although there is no clear timeline for this. The newcomers felt that this is a process of building trust

between the two sites, hence, they expect to have more opportunities when trust is gained. However, the way the project was currently led caused some concerns among both sites as the newcomers felt that as long as the Finnish team has all decision power and the Model Owners are there, the Romanian teams cannot gain enough ownership. On the other hand, the insiders doubted that it could take a long time for the newcomers to gain enough knowledge about the regulations and necessary controls to be able to have full ownership over some core modules. However, in the future, the insiders expected to work on the same level with the Romanians and in the same way as with their local team. This was also supported by the fact that some of the newcomers were invited to Finland, after seven months into the first newcomers had started, to learn more about what it means to have ownership and what responsibilities are included. One insider had also explained the newcomers what the company has to offer them and how does their career paths look like, though, they would need to first cope with uncertainty and simpler tasks before getting there. Nevertheless, as seen from below comment, the newcomers expect things to get better in the future.

*“I hope things will start working okay that we will have more experience and build things and get more responsibilities. I would want them to have trust in us and to get to that level of confidence and to feel that we are doing good job and that we can continue on our own.” (Newcomer P)*

## 5 Discussion

This section reflects and compares the findings of this thesis with the theories presented in the literature review. This thesis aimed to study the newcomer assimilation process in a newly distributed R&D unit of a global software company, by responding to the following research questions:

- 1) What factors affect the ways newcomers assimilate into common work practices of a distant site in a recently established globally distributed project?
- 2) How does socialization tactics as well as face-to-face and virtual activities affect this assimilation?

The key factors analyzed in this research were identified from the existing literature of newcomer assimilation although new emerging themes also were allowed to emerge. Based on the findings from the interviews, the identified key factors from the literature are mostly relevant in this study as well, though, they do not alone explain the factors relevant to newcomer assimilation in a globally distributed context. In what follows, the ways socialization tactics, face-to-face and virtual activities affect the newcomers' assimilation are discussed and compared with the existing literature, followed by a discussion of assimilation success. The aim of this section is to explore if this study supports or opposes the existing literature and findings, or if any new discoveries have emerged.

### 5.1 Socialization tactics

As noted by Hart and Miller (2005), during the entry period, newcomers receive information related to, for example, their tasks and organizational goals and values. In this study, the company also aimed to successfully share all the relevant information and knowledge with the newcomers. To support this task, the company used different kinds of socialization tactics. Based on Van Maanen (1978), the socialization tactics are usually combined together, which also was done in this case company. Hence, based on Jones' (1986) categorization of socialization tactics, the tactics used by the case company are institutionalized in nature. Furthermore, in line with Allen and Meyer's (1990) definitions, the case company provide a similar learning experience for all its new hires, as all newcomers are required to participate in common new hire trainings. In this study, the orientation program for the first newcomers who had their orientation in Finland was formal in nature as the trainings occurred in classrooms rather than on-the-job. Further, similarly to

Black and Ashford's (1995) study, the newcomers were expected to take in and adopt all information provided to them and participate in all trainings even though these might not have been relevant to their roles particularly.

In sum, the case company provides its new hires collective, formal, sequential and fixed socialization process. Furthermore, the first newcomers had also appointed mentors in Finland who were responsible of the newcomers' introduction and acted as their first point-of-contact. Hence, the case company also used serial tactics to support its newcomers' assimilation. According to Van Maanen (1978), the use of these tactics aims to maintain similarities in thinking and actions, while Jones (1986) noted how these tactics aim to acceptance of the common norms and values. The use of these tactics was also supported by this study, as the goal of this case company was to teach its newcomers the common ways of working and the culture, so the newcomers would be able to transfer these good practices to the new Romanian office. In contrast, those newcomers who joined later on had a little bit different orientation experience, which caused some difficulties for them to assimilate successfully, and eventually they were also invited to Finland to provide them with a possibility to get to know insiders and their ways of working. Van Maanen (1978) has argued that the lack of formal structures makes it difficult for newcomers to learn and adopt the common norms and values. Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999) also found support for trainings as they were found to associate with knowledge and acceptance of organizational culture. This thesis supports these arguments as the newcomers adopted the values and ways of working which were presented to them during the trainings. However, as identified in the findings, these were the ideal ways, hence, the real ways should have also been taught to the newcomers in a more direct and unambiguous way.

However, one could also argue that the case company was utilizing individualized tactics as well, as defined by Jones (1986), especially, when analyzing the socialization experience of the first newcomers. After the formal trainings, those newcomers continued their assimilation process on-the-job as they were integrated in different Scrum teams to learn more about the product and business they would be working with. Hence, after the formal process, the newcomers continued their assimilation through an informal process as defined by Allen and Meyer (1990). This supports Van Maanen's (1978) findings of formal processes being usually only the first round of socialization followed by informal processes aiming to teach newcomers to perform a specific role in a company successfully. On the other hand, those newcomers who joined later on reported how they had started working with real tasks before participating in the formal orientation. Hence, they did not know the



clear sequence or timing of their orientation activities, i.e. the case company used – unintentionally or not – random and variable tactics to integrate these newcomers.

## **5.2 Face-to-face & virtual activities**

Waldeck et al. (2004) found that face-to-face communication was the most important to facilitate assimilation effectively, followed by the use of electronic communication technologies. Based on interviews and observations, similar conclusions can be drawn here. In this study, face-to-face activities cover those activities that support assimilation through activities taking place being co-located, while virtual activities refer to those activities, which happen through different communication tools provided by the case company.

### **5.2.1 Information seeking in co-located and virtual contexts**

Information seeking is important during the entry stage of assimilation as it helps newcomers to reduce possible reality shocks and feelings of uncertainty and increase role clarity and social acceptance (Bauer et al., 2007; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Ritti & Funkhouser, 1987). These effects of information seeking were also found in this study. Furthermore, this study supported Teboul's (1994) suggestion that newcomers should be proactive themselves to acquire information rather than waiting for organizational insiders to provide it. Here, this was pointed out by both the insiders and newcomers. For example, the insiders praised the newcomers' proactive information seeking activities, while the newcomers admitted that they need to be proactive and to know when to ask help. In addition, those newcomers who had their orientation in Finland had to be even more proactive to be able to take in all the necessary knowledge before they started their work in Romania on their own. Hence, this study also brings support to Gruman and Saks' (2011) study where they identified that proactive behavior is common when newcomers start a new job, and further, when they intended to seek information and socialize with organizational members.

Previous studies (e.g. Jablin, 1987; Teboul, 1994) have identified co-workers as the most important source for acquiring information. Furthermore, Cooper-Thomas et al. (2014) found that role modeling, i.e. when organizational insiders act as an example for newcomers, was the strongest facilitator for learning. This study provided further support to these findings as the newcomers identified their immediate colleagues as the first point-of-contact when help was needed during their entry stage. The newcomers reported that they contacted their local team members first as they were considered to be the most convenient source, and only after this, the team in Finland was contacted. This also showed that the use of overt

asking was a prevalent information-seeking tactic, as the newcomers most often asked help directly rather than relied on other tactics, especially if specific information relating to their tasks was needed or if it was ad-hoc in nature. Hence, this was aligned with previous research (Comer, 1991; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Miller, 1996; Teboul, 1994) in that they too found that newcomers are likely to use overt tactics more than any other tactics. In addition, the newcomers emphasized the importance of feedback, and again, the co-workers were identified as the primary source. Miller and Jablin (1991) and Morrison (1993) have also made similar findings earlier as feedback from organizational insiders was found to be important for newcomers in order to integrate into their organizations and to perform their tasks successfully. To conclude, in this study, co-workers were seen as the primary source who were contacted directly to gain information and feedback related to newcomers' tasks such as necessary skills to perform the task successfully.

Many of the newcomers, especially those who had their orientation in Finland, relied on observation as well for acquiring information. Observation was used when the newcomers acquired information related to ways of working and how they in their Romanian teams were expected to work and collaborate. Hence, this practice was also similar to what have been identified in the past, with prior literature suggesting that observation is used when newcomers try to obtain information regarding proper behavior (e.g. Miller & Jablin, 1991; Weiss, 1977) as well as organizational goals and values (e.g. Morrison, 1993; Kraimer, 1997). Furthermore, as suggested by Miller and Jablin (1991), some of the newcomers who joined later on shadowed their colleagues if they were performing similar tasks as the newcomers would perform in the future to observe how their colleagues were performing those tasks. Ducheneaut (2005) has also emphasized the value of observation, for newcomers to adopt common norms and values in software development projects, but in addition, it is important for the coders to build an identity for themselves and become visible for the insiders. Based on the result of this study, becoming visible for insider is much more difficult in a virtual context. The software developers (newcomers) of this study struggled with showing their added value to the community, due to low visibility and low influence power over distance. Apart from previous research in the co-located context, the virtual environment limited the amount of observation to only minimal, making assimilation more difficult for newcomers. It was not until several site visits that the newcomers actually understood why they faced difficulties with gaining ownership, for instance. The importance of site visits is surprising, since the work context is a high-tech software company, with advanced technologies both for communication and for the actual coding work.

In addition, to the above mentioned, in line with previous research (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993), referent information, i.e. information about the expectations of other organizational members, were reported as important. However, in this study, insiders were not able to provide referent information and clarify future tasks to the newcomers. As a result, newcomers were left with a lack of clear expectations, which was considered to hinder their performance and assimilation. Again, the virtual context accelerated this, as the newcomers were not able to see all relevant cues (e.g. non-verbal cues) that would give them confirmation. The newcomers reported how the insiders' expectations were not clear to them causing frustration and confusion among them, as they were unsure when they would reach the same level with the Finnish team.

### 5.2.2 Information seeking through virtual channels

Knowledge sharing is crucial in knowledge-intensive contexts such as agile software development, but still, it is common for agile software development to face challenges with this (Salovaara & Tuunainen, 2013). According to Salovaara and Tuunainen's (2013) findings, leaner communication tools such as Skype chat, may constitute a powerful tool for informing and peer helping. Others, again, point out that the use of different technologies expands newcomers' opportunities to seek information actively, hence, supporting successful assimilation (Waldeck et al., 2004). In this study, the newcomers could utilize the case company's intranet and wiki pages, which were also identified by Morrison (1993) and by Flanagan and Waldeck (2004) as useful information sources for organizational policies and values and technical manuals, for example, to reduce uncertainty. However, in this study, these materials had only a minor effect on newcomers' assimilation. Rather to use these channels, the newcomers preferred to use more both asynchronous (e.g. email) and synchronous (e.g. Teams, Skype) tools in their daily work to contact the team in Finland and ask help from them. In other words, by using these tools the newcomers could contact the insiders in Finland whenever they needed. Hence, in line with Salovaara and Tuunainen (2013) leaner tools such as Skype, were found to be actively used for information among distributed software developers, but in addition, voice and video were oftentimes preferred for more ambiguous situations.

However, Oshri et al. (2007) found in their study that during the early stages of the projects, the use of synchronous channels increased after the remote team members had met each other. The same pattern could be identified in this study as well. For example, as one newcomer described, the newcomers sometimes felt awkward when communicating via

these tools with people they had never met. This highlights the importance of site visits before becoming highly dependent on virtual means of communication.

However, the use of virtual channels does not come without challenges. For example, Ahuja and Galvin (2003) pointed out how newcomers cannot utilize observations in virtual settings, so tacit knowledge about behaviors and values, for example, should be substituted with direct communication. In addition, as noted by Cascio (2000) and by Cramton (2002) non-verbal cues are nonexistent in virtual setting meaning that more questions should be asked to ensure that team members understand each other thoroughly and to minimize the risk of interpreting the messages incorrectly. Similar problems were also identified in this study as, for example, the lack of non-verbal cues was seen to complicate the interpretations of messages. For instance, in one case, the tone of a message was misinterpreted to mean rudeness, since the receiver did not know that the sender was simply busy and therefore short worded. Therefore, newcomers should be even more proactive and tolerant when seeking information in virtual settings than in co-located settings. The newcomers of this study, were highly proactive which could be seen by their rate of communication as the insiders pointed out how the interactions with the Romanians took place daily, sometimes even hourly, with the newcomers asking for help.

Furthermore, Cramton (2002) has highlighted that the risk of teams having different information increases when the teams are working in different locations. This was true in this study as well, as the newcomers had learned the ideal ways of working without understanding that the project was working in a different way at the other location. In particular, those newcomers who did not have their orientation in Finland, were feeling a little confused about this, as they described how they did not understand the ways of working as they did not have the opportunity to observe others, highlighting the importance of direct communication in virtual setting to gain tacit knowledge.

Cramton (2002) also found that distributed teams seem to be vulnerable to communication failures. For example, when communicating via different technologies, moments of silence could be perceived differently, which was also true in this study. Similar to Cramton's (2002) findings, the newcomers of this study did not know whether a silence, i.e. late reaction or no reaction to a question, was because the other person was busy, investigating the issue or not interested in helping. This can be explained through the fact that visible cues (e.g. open door, knowledge about local holidays) are oftentimes lacking in a virtual context, and hence, it is difficult to know if someone is available or not, and secondly, by the fact that people are less likely to get responses to messages by people they

don't know well (Grinter et al., 1999). In addition, the newcomers oftentimes did not know if the message receivers' silence was an indicator of an agreement or not. Hence, as suggested by the insiders of this study as well as by Cramton (2002), the receiver should remember to acknowledge the received message if they are present to let the submitter know that it was noticed and that something is being done. In this study, newcomers felt an increased feeling of insecurity due to lack of responses, slowing their assimilation rate down.

### 5.2.3 Formal and informal mentoring

Co-workers are the most convenient source to support newcomers' assimilation by acting as informal socialization agents (Miller & Jablin, 1991), or by acting as an information source (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999). Hence, Hart (2012) has suggested organizations to utilize their insiders as mentors as they are in the best position to affect newcomers' acceptance into the teams. On the other hand, Picherit-Duthler et al. (2004) have suggested organizations to establish mentor programs even in virtual context as newcomers are able to become more comfortable of their new work environment. These notions were found to be true in this study as well, as newcomers highly relied on co-workers to provide them with information and help to support their assimilation.

In this study, the newcomers had both formal and informal mentors supporting their assimilation as they entered the company. Those newcomers who had their orientation in Finland had formal mentors appointed by the company, while the other newcomers had only informal mentors, who were the co-workers who had helped them the most during their entry. Similar to Picherit-Duthler et al.'s (2004) findings of the importance of informal mentors, where the pairing happens naturally, one newcomer pointed out how her colleagues shared information and experiences with her, which helped her to feel accepted and to settle in.

However, similarly to Feldman's (1994) findings, problems that occurred related to the workloads of these formal mentors. In this study, this was highlighted by those insiders acting as mentors and/or who were the key persons in the project, since at times, they felt a lot of pressure when they had responsibilities over the newcomers but also over their daily work. Based on the interviews, these insiders had to balance between their daily work and requests coming from newcomers. Hence, as they helped the newcomers and answered their questions, this time was away from their daily work and vice versa, and oftentimes they felt that the newcomers always asked help from the same persons. This finding is line with Grinter et al.'s study (1999) on a teamwork in globally distributed software development,

where team members tended to rely on only one particular core team member at a distant site from whom they then asked all of their questions.

#### 5.2.4 Social activities

In addition to formal mentors (insiders), other organizational members (including other newcomers that had joined earlier) were identified as the most important sources for information seeking, i.e. served as socialization agents to support newcomers to fit in. The informal social interactions with them were also identified as supporting newcomers' assimilation, and relations building. The importance of social activities is backed up in a vast amount of previous research. For instance, Cable and Parsons (2001) found that social interactions with the organizational insiders support the newcomers in learning and adopting the values, while Bauer and Green (1994) found that the more newcomers engaged in social activities, the greater level of assimilation they experienced. Similarly, Hinds and Cramton (2014) found that when virtual team members were socializing with each other outside of work hours, it increased familiarity, and consequently, deepened their relationships. In addition, Lewandowski et al. (2011) found that those team members who received more social support reported lower levels of negative feelings in a negative situation than those who received less social support. But while this study supports all of these prior research, it also suggest that newcomers tend to socialize primarily with their co-located peers due to little opportunities or initiatives for socializing taking place in the virtual context, over distance.

#### 5.2.5 The importance of site visits in virtual environment

As most of the previous assimilation researchers have focused on co-located teams, site visits and face-to-face discussions are not highlighted in these studies. However, Allen (2006) emphasized that even in virtual context organizations should not ignore the social activities as important facilitators for successful assimilation. In addition, as Oshri et al. (2007) found out that in globally distributed teams, newcomer assimilation takes place through electronic communication and/or through face-to-face interactions. In this study, both face-to-face and virtual activities were found important for newcomers' successful assimilation, supporting the previous studies. This suggests that newcomers should have frequent opportunities to meet and interact with other organizational members.

Based on Crowston et al. (2007) and Hinds and Cramton (2014), site visits and face-to-face means are no less important in virtual environment than in co-located teams. In this

study, the first newcomers highlighted the importance of the site visit to Finland as an opportunity for them to learn and observe others before starting their work in Romania. Hence, this was aligned with the research of Oshri et al. (2007) who found that infrequent and limited face-to-face meetings might hinder the information sharing of values and behaviors. In addition, according to Zahedi and Babar (2016), face-to-face interactions are important for getting to know each other, for maintaining social relationships and for supporting information sharing in global software development. They also highlight that if members have not met personally, they have a hard time to understand each other since non-verbal cues (e.g. tone of voice, attitudes) are limited when communicating through virtual channels. Both newcomers and insiders of this study highlighted the importance of site visits, i.e. face-to-face meetings, which were seen to support and maintain collaboration and communication when people have met each other. For example, the newcomers felt that when they had met the Finnish team, the communication was easier and quicker which was also supported by the insiders. This finds support in Ahuja and Galvin's (2003) as well as in Hinds and Cramton's study (2014) who found that face-to-face meetings support collaboration in virtual context when after meeting distant team members personally, members were more responsive and replying to virtual messages more rapidly.

According to Grinter et al. (1999), mistrust can occur due the fact that the remote team has less background with the R&D project than those team members working at the core location. During the interviews, many of the newcomers reported to feel mistrusted by the Finnish team as they were unwilling to share the ownership with the Romanians. Hence, this feeling of mistrust resulted in conflicts, which were considered to be impossible to be solved through virtual channels but rather requiring some face-to-face time and discussions, as reported by the insiders. This has support from previous research as, for example, Cramton (2002) has found that the use of electronic channels is likely to make it difficult to resolve these problems quickly. Similarly, Zahedi and Babar (2016) found that site visits provided the visitors the opportunity to share their concerns and frustration, revealing some misunderstandings of the common practices. Hence, in virtual environment, one should not forget the importance and benefits of site visits, especially as a way to prevent conflicts to occur.

In addition, as reported by Cramton (2002), site visits also provide people the opportunity to learn and understand the work context of others, which could be useful for collaboration. This was also suggested by the newcomers who noted that face-to-face meetings would create more empathy between the teams. Similarly, the insiders wanted to

visit the other location just to see and understand how the possible problems affect the others' work. In sum, because there were cultural differences and prejudices toward the other team and as the teams were required to communicate in a foreign language, causing small conflicts to rapidly burst up into bigger ones, face-to-face meetings might have been particularly important for overcoming these problems.

### **5.3 Analyzing the assimilation success**

When reflecting the interviews and observations with the matrix created by Reichers (1987), conclusions can be made regarding the assimilation rates in different contexts. When analyzing the interactions between the first newcomers who visited in Finland and the insiders, both sides were proactive hinting rapid assimilation rate as the face-to-face time provided the opportunity to have frequent interactions. On the other hand, when analyzing the assimilation rate among the newcomers, i.e. between the first joined newcomers and the ones who joined later on, again a rapid assimilation rate can be identified. The newcomers have been very proactive in socializing among themselves, and the first joined newcomers have acted as informal mentors to the newest Romanian team members. Hence, both site visits and co-location seem to facilitate quick assimilation as newcomers as the newcomers can ask questions more efficiently as well as the team members can participate in different social activities. This was also supported by the findings of Reichers (1987).

In contrast, when the assimilation rate is analyzed between the Finnish and Romanian teams, the rate seemed to be more intermediate than rapid. Based on the interviews, the newcomers seemed to be more proactive in seeking interactions with the Finland team members as they were reported to ask lot of questions. However, similar to Reichers' (1987) results, this resulted in a situation where there were only rear interactions between the two sides as the newcomers noticed that the Finnish team does not communicate with them that much. Hence, proactive side reduced its interactions attempts, which shortly led to a situation where no one was proactive.

Furthermore, when analyzing the Romanians' assimilation success with Myers and Oetzel's OAI measure (2003), they have become familiar with the others and they are performing their tasks successfully, hence, the socialization dimensions of familiarity with others and job competency are achieved. This provides further support for Myers and Oetzel's (2003) results but also for Chao et al.'s (1994) which both identified the getting to know others as an important antecedent for the newcomers for fitting in. In addition, the newcomers have also achieved to learn the acculturation content, which was defined by



Myers and Oetzel (2003) as the adaptation of the organizational culture and norms. In software companies, as Agile methods are commonly used nowadays, newcomer assimilation might occur more rapidly as the newcomers are likely to already have previous experiences of these methods that help them to adjust to their new organization and to adopt their common ways of working.

On the other hand, this was also the reason behind the other assimilation gap identified earlier as the newcomers had adopted only the ideal ways of working (perhaps in line with their previous agile work experience) instead of those real ways. This is causing problems between the two sides but also it is hindering newcomers' assimilation. Chudoba et al. (2005) have come to a similar conclusion earlier as the lack of common work practices is found to be greater block to successful collaboration in virtual environment than the distance itself. Furthermore, according to Chao et al. (1994) and Myers and Oetzel (2003), if a newcomer fails to adapt the organizational culture and values, he or she is likely to leave the organization. The other gap was the result of the opposite interpretations of the Romanian teams' readiness of gaining ownership. While the Romanians considered to be ready and wanting to work according to the company's values, the insiders were hoping slower progress from the newcomers. This has caused schism between the two sides as the newcomers felt that the other side does not trust them and that they are performing less important tasks than the others do. This indicates that the recognition dimension (Myers & Oetzel, 2003) is not covered yet.

Successful assimilation is important for both newcomers and the organization since it is linked to job satisfaction, increased performance and decreased turnover (Wanous, 1980; Louis, 1980b). However, according to Jones (1986), the early experiences do not often meet the expectations, decreasing job satisfaction and increasing the possibility of turnovers in the early stages of employment. Furthermore, based on Myers and Oetzel (2003), the adaptation dimension signify that the newcomers have integrated into the organization, but usually this requires them to compromise some of their expectations. Hence, before the ways of working are aligned and the newcomers are able to gain more ownership, it is likely that they are not fully assimilated to the global R&D team, though, they seem to be assimilated to their local teams already. If the expectations are not met, the newcomers might be unmotivated to stay, and they might be likely to search other opportunities outside of the case company. However, the newcomers might also have to compromise some of their expectations of gaining ownership sooner than later if they wish to be assimilated fully.

## 6 Conclusion

This section summarizes this thesis by first looking back on the case study. Then, practical recommendations that this study provides are presented, relating to what should be taken into account when newcomers are expected to assimilate in a geographically dispersed project. Finally, limitations of this study are discussed together with suggestions for future research.

### 6.1 Research summary

Newcomer assimilation and socialization has raised considerably interest among researchers for many years now, resulting in different viewpoints. Assimilation can be studied through a stage model, by focusing on the newcomers' proactive behaviors or by focusing on the tactics organizations use when newcomers join an organization. In a co-located work context, newcomer assimilation happens mainly through face-to-face means. However, recent changes in the work environment has changed the context to which newcomers are expected to assimilate in, and organizations are more and more applying globally distributed work forces. In this context, the use of electronic communication channels are important facilitators for successful assimilation, though, face-to-face time should not be forgotten. Furthermore, previous literature has focused on established and existing contexts to which the newcomers assimilate in.

The findings identified two specific assimilation gaps, which were found to hinder newcomers' assimilation. Hence, the assimilation gap as a phenomenon is a new addition to the existing assimilation literature. In addition, this research extends previous assimilation literature by studying newcomer assimilation in the context of a newly distributed R&D project meaning that all the employees of the new distant team are newcomers. The purpose of this research was to understand how newcomers' assimilation is affected by the different activities (socialization tactics, face-to-face and virtual activities) performed by both the case company and the newcomers themselves. Qualitative data was collected through field observations and semi-structured interviews from which 19 were with the newcomers and 10 with the organizational insiders. Furthermore, all the newcomers at that point were interviewed, while the organizational insiders represented those who were actively participating in socialization activities by acting as formal mentors or being the project's key persons.

On the other hand, the findings suggest that the activities identified by previous researchers are relevant in this context as well. The newcomers highlighted face-to-face time especially, as a facilitator for successful assimilation. In addition, both the insiders and newcomers identified face-to-face time as way to maintain and improve collaboration and communication between the two distributed sites.

## **6.2 Implications for practice**

Generally, individual newcomers are expected to adjust to their new work group, but what happens when the whole group is new, and all team members are newcomers? This study has found key factors to be taken into account when a company establishes a new development team into a new location, which can help other companies to do the same.

This thesis showed that newcomers' assimilation to a distributed project is not easy, and there are many pitfalls, which could hinder the successful assimilation. When it comes to a virtual environment, there are the activities the company can perform to support the assimilation but also all those face-to-face and virtual activities that need to be taken into account. In virtual environment, newcomers should be more proactive in seeking information than in co-located teams since they cannot rely on observation and non-verbal messages. However, the company should not forget the importance and benefits of face-to-face time even in this setting since the newcomers are likely to assimilate through face-to-face and virtual activities. In this study, especially the site visits were found to be valued by both the insiders and the newcomers during the early stages of employment. Supported by Cramton (2002), newly distributed teams are advised to meet face-to-face to build relationships and trust between the teams.

In addition, based on the findings of this study, it is also important to involve the insiders. Similar to Ahuja and Galvin (2003), in virtual context, the insiders provide information and the newcomers seek information the same way as in co-located context. Hence, as the insiders know the best how the project works and what are the practical or project-specific things, they should be empowered to teach these to the newcomers which are not communicated to them in the formal trainings. Furthermore, building on the findings of this study and prior research, this study provides further support for companies to facilitate and encourage team building and social activities among their employees that could also occur outside of work to facilitate successful assimilation.

When it comes to transferring the company's culture and common ways of working to the new distant site, it is highly important to communicate both the ideal ways but also the

real ways if there are any differences in practice. This support the newcomers' assimilation as they adopt the real ways and are able to become performing members of the global team more quickly as there are no confusions or conflicts that could create assimilation gaps. In addition, the lack of common practices in using the different communication tools was causing communication blocks, which could be resolved by having more common practices. Hence, the assimilation gaps could be resolved with common ways of working and by clearly communicating the expectations of the insiders to the newcomers to minimize the risk of early turnovers. When the newcomers' expectations are not met, and feelings of frustration are increasing, newcomers are likely to seek other opportunities outside of their current company. According to Sim and Holt (1998), it is important for the organizations to minimize feelings of frustration and maintain newcomers' positive feelings (e.g. motivation and excitement) which are likely to carry newcomers through many obstacles.

On the other hand, the organizational insiders' needs should not be forgotten, especially if their work environment changes dramatically when the newcomers join the company. Therefore, they might have to learn new ways of working even though their own tasks are not changing. For example, resocialization activities might be needed if the collaboration and communication via virtual channels is somewhat new to them or if they are not used to having distant project members requiring even more use of these channels.

### **6.3 Limitations and suggestions for futures research**

In this study, there are some limitations that needs to be taken into account. This study was conducted in a single software company establishing a new R&D team to a new location. The research object was the newcomers' assimilation into this distributed project. As the scope included only once case, more research is needed to confirm the general nature of the findings from this study. Hence, it would also have been interesting to study this topic as a multi-case study with different companies establishing new distant offices that would turn previous co-located teams and projects into global ones. In addition, this study did not consider gender and its effects on newcomers' assimilation success. Hence, there could be differences between male and female newcomers, providing further possibilities for future research.

Another limitation relates to the different virtual activities during newcomer assimilation. This research focused mostly on the information seeking as well as on communication on a higher level. Due to information security policies of the case company,

no deeper analysis could be done, for example, of the message contents and how these are affecting newcomers' assimilation.

Due to the nature of this thesis, the study focuses only to the first two of the assimilation stages leaving the metamorphosis stage out of the scope. In other words, only the assimilation success or failure of the newcomers during the anticipatory and entry stages are studied. Therefore, it would have been interesting to study the newcomers throughout their assimilation process all the way to the metamorphosis stage to be able to understand thoroughly how the different activities affect the assimilation success.

## References

- Ahuja, M. K. & Carley, K. M. (1999) Network Structure in Virtual Organizations. *Organization Science*. Vol. 10, No. 6, November-December 1999, pp. 741-757.
- Ahuja, M. K. & Galvin, J. E. (2003) Socialization in Virtual Groups. *Journal of Management*. Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 161-185.
- Allen, N. J. & Meyer, J. P. (1990) Organizational Socialization Tactics: A Longitudinal Analysis of Links to Newcomers' Commitment and Role Orientation. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 847-858.
- Allen, D. G. (2006) Do Organizational Socialization Tactics Influence Newcomer Embeddedness and Turnover? *Journal of Management*. Vol. 32, No. 2, April 2006, pp. 237-256.
- Anakwe, U. O. & Greenhaus, J. H. (1999) Effective Socialization of Employees: Socialization Content Perspective. *Journal of Managerial Issues*. Vol. 11, No. 3, Fall 1999, pp. 315-329.
- Applbaum, R. L., Bodaken, E. M., Sereno, K. K. & Anatol, K. W. E. (1974) *The Process of Group Communication*. Chicago, IL, USA: Science Research Associates, Inc. 311 s.
- Ashforth, B. E. & Saks, A. M. (1996) Socialization Tactics: Longitudinal Effects on Newcomer Adjustment. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 149-178.
- Bauer, T. N., Bodner, T., Erdogan, B., Truxillo D. M. & Tucker, J. S. (2007) Newcomer Adjustment During Organizational Socialization: A Meta-Analytic Review of Antecedents, Outcomes, and Methods. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 92, No. 3, pp. 707-721.
- Bauer, T. N. & Green, S. G. (1994) Effect of Newcomer Involvement in Work-Related Activities: A Longitudinal Study of Socialization. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 79, No. 2, pp. 211-223.
- Bauer, T. N. & Green, A. G. (1998) Testing the Combined Effects of Newcomer Information Seeking and Manager Behavior on Socialization. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 83, No. 1, pp. 72-83.
- Black, J. S. & Ashford, S. J. (1995) Fitting in or Making Jobs Fit: Factors Affecting Mode of Adjustment for New Hires. *Human Relations*. Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 421-437.

- Boden, A., Nett, B. & Wulf, V. (2010) Operational and Strategic Learning in Global Software Development. *IEEE Software*. Vol. 27, No. 6, November-December 2010, pp. 58-65.
- Bullis, C. & Bach, B. W. (1989) Are Mentor Relationships Helping Organizations? An Exploration of Developing Mentee-Mentor-Organizational Identifications Using Turning Point Analysis. *Communication Quarterly*. Vol. 37, No. 3, Summer 1989, pp. 199-213.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017) Economic news release: Job openings and labor turnover survey news release. November 2017. Available at: [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.htm#jolts\\_table2.f.2](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.htm#jolts_table2.f.2), [5.2.2018].
- Cable, D. M. & Judge, T. A. (1996) Person-Organization Fit, Job Choice Decisions, and Organizational Entry. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. Vol. 67, No. 3, September 1996, pp. 294-311.
- Cable, D. M. & Judge, T. A. (1997) Interviewers' Perceptions of Person-Organization Fit and Organizational Selection Decisions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 82, No. 4, pp. 546-561.
- Cable, D. M. & Parsons, C. K. (2001) Socialization Tactics and Person-Organization Fit. *Personnel Psychology*. Vol. 54, No. 1, March 2001, pp. 1-23.
- Cascio, W. F. (2000) Managing a virtual workplace. *Academy of Management Executive*. Vol. 14, No. 3, August 2000, pp. 81-90.
- Chao, G. T., O'Leary-Kelly, A. M., Wolf, S., Klein, H. J. & Gardner, P. D. (1994) Organizational Socialization: Its Content and Consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 79, No. 5, pp. 730-743.
- Chudoba, K. M. & Watson-Manheim, M. B. (2008) Shared communication practices and mental models in the virtual work environment, in Pantelli, N. & Chiasson, M. (eds.) *Exploring Virtuality within and beyond Organizations. Social, Global and Local Dimensions*. New York, NY, USA: Palgrave MacMillan. pp. 55-72.
- Chudoba, K. M., Wynn, E., Lu, M. & Watson-Manheim, M. B. (2005) How virtual are we? Measuring virtuality and understanding its impact in a global organization. *Information Systems Journal*. Vol. 15, No. 4, October 2005, pp. 279-306.
- Comer, D. R. (1991) Organizational Newcomers' Acquisition of Information from Peers. *Management Communication Quarterly*. Vol. 5, No. 1, August 1991, pp. 64-89.

- Cooper-Thomas, H., Anderson, N. & Cash, M. (2012) Investigating Organizational Socialization: A Fresh Look at Newcomer Adjustment Strategies. *Personnel Review*. Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 41-55.
- Cooper-Thomas, H. D., Paterson, N. L., Stadler, M. J. & Saks, A. M. (2014) The relative importance of proactive behaviors and outcomes for predicting newcomer learning, well-being, and work engagement. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Vol. 84, No. 3, June 2014, pp. 318-331.
- Cramton, C. D. (2001) The Mutual Knowledge Problem and Its Consequences for Dispersed Collaboration. *Organization Science*. Vol. 12, No. 3, May-June 2001, pp. 346-371.
- Cramton, C. D. (2002) Finding Common Ground in Dispersed Collaboration. *Organizational Dynamics*. Vol. 30, No. 4, Spring 2002, pp. 356-367.
- Crowston, K., Howison, J., Masango, C. & Eseryel, U. Y. (2007) The Role of Face-to-Face Meetings in Technology-Supported Self-Organizing Distributed Teams. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*. Vol. 50, No. 3, September 2007, pp. 185-203.
- Culnan, M. J. & Markus, M. L. (1987) Information Technologies, in Jablin, F. M., Putnam, L. L., Roberts, K. H. & Porter, L. W. (eds.) *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications. pp. 420-443.
- DeSanctis, G. & Monge, P. (1999) Introduction to the Special Issue: Communication Processes for Virtual Organizations. *Organization Science*. Vol. 10, No. 6, November-December 1999, pp. 693-703.
- Dirsmith, M. W. & Covalleski, M. A. (1985) Informal Communications, Nonformal Communications and Mentoring in Public Accounting Firms. *Accounting Organizations and Society*. Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 149-169.
- Ducheneaut, N. (2005) Socialization in an Open Source Software Community: A Socio-Technical Analysis. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work*. Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 323-368.
- Ellram, L. M. (1996) The Use of the Case Study Method in Logistics Research. *Journal of Business Logistics*. Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 93-138.
- Eskola, J. & Suoranta, J. (2001) *Johdatus laadulliseen tutkimukseen*, 5th edition. Tampere, FI: Vastapaino, 268 p.
- Feldman, D. C. (1976) A Contingency Theory of Socialization. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol. 21, No. 3, September 1976, pp. 433-452.



- Feldman, D. C. (1994) Who's Socializing Whom? The Impact of Socializing Newcomers on Insiders, Work Groups, and Organizations. *Human Resource Management Review*. Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 213-233.
- Flanagin, A. J. & Waldeck, J. H. (2004) Technology Use and Organizational Newcomer Socialization. *Journal of Business Communication*. Vol. 41, No. 2, April 2004, pp. 137-165.
- Fulk, J. & DeSanctis, G. (1995) Electronic Communication and Changing Organizational Forms. *Organization Science*. Vol. 6, No. 4, July-August 1995, pp. 337-349.
- Gailliard, B. M., Myers, K. K. & Seibold, D. R. (2010) Organizational Assimilation: A Multidimensional Reconceptualization and Measure. *Management Communication Quarterly*. Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 552-578.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 152 p.
- Gerwin, D. (1981) Control and Evaluation in The Innovative Process: The Case of Flexible Manufacturing Systems. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*. Vol. 28, No.3, pp. 62 -70.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G. & Hamilton, A. L. (2012) Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*. Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 15-31.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL, USA: Aldine, 271 p.
- Goldman, B. M. & Shapiro, D. L. (2012) *The Psychology of Negotiations in the 21st Century Workplace: New Challenges and New Solutions*. New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 588 p.
- Grinter, R. E., Herbsleb, J. D. & Perry, D. E. (1999) The Geography of Coordination: Dealing with Distance in R&D Work. In *Proceedings of the international ACM SIGGROUP Conference on Supporting Group Work*. New York, NY, USA: ACM, pp. 306-315.
- Gruman, J. A. & Saks, A. M. (2011) Socialization preferences and intentions: Does one size fit all? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Vol. 79, No. 2, pp. 419-427.
- Hart, Z. P. (2012) Message Content and Sources During Organizational Socialization. *Journal of Business Communication*. Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 191-209.

- Hart, Z. P. & Miller, V. D. (2005) Context and Message Content During Organizational Socialization. *Human Communication Research*. Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2005, pp. 295–309.
- Hinds, P. J. & Cramton, C. D. (2014) Situated Coworker Familiarity: How Site Visits Transform Relationships Among Distributed Workers. *Organization Science*. Vol. 25, No. 3, May–June 2014, pp. 794-814.
- Hirsjärvi, S. & Hurme, H. (2008) *Tutkimushaastattelu. Teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö*. Helsinki, FI: Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press, 213 p.
- Hirsjärvi, S., Remes, P. & Sajavaara, P. (2009) *Tutki ja kirjoita*. Helsinki, FI: Tammi, 464 p.
- Holliday, A. (2008) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London, UK: Sage Publications, 199 p.
- Jablin, F. M. (1987) Organizational Entry, Assimilation, and Exit, in Jablin, F. M., Putnam, L. L., Roberts, K. H. & Porter, L. W. (eds.) *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications. pp. 679-740.
- Jablin, F. M. (2001) Organizational Entry, Assimilation, and Disengagement/Exit, in Jablin, F. M. & Putnam, L. L. (eds.) *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publications. pp. 732-818.
- Jones, G. R. (1986) Socialization Tactics, Self-Efficacy, And Newcomers' Adjustments to Organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol. 29, No. 2, pp- 262-279.
- Kellermann, K. & Reynolds, R. (1990) When Ignorance is Bliss: The Role of Motivation to Reduce Uncertainty in Uncertainty Reduction Theory. *Human Communication Research*. Vol. 17, No. 1, Fall 1990, pp. 5-75.
- Koskinen, I., Alasuutari, P. & Peltonen, T. (2005) *Laadulliset menetelmät kauppatieteissä*. Tampere, FI: Vastapaino, 350 p.
- Kraimer, M. L. (1997) Organizational Goals and Values: A Socialization Model. *Human Resource Management Review*. Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 425-447
- Lewandowski, J., Rosenberg, B. D., Parks, M. J. & Siegel, J. T. (2011) The effect of informal social support: Face-to-face versus computer-mediated communication. *Computers in Human Behavior*. Vol. 27, No. 5, pp. 1806-1814.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications, 416 p.

- Louis, M. R. (1980a) Career Transitions: Varieties and Commonalities. *Academy of Management Review*. Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 329-340.
- Louis, M. R. (1980b) Surprise and Sense Making: What Newcomers Experience in Entering Unfamiliar Organizational Settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 226-251.
- Louis, M. R., Posner, B. Z. & Powell, G. N. (1983). The Availability and Helpfulness of Socialization Practices. *Personnel Psychology*. Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 857-866.
- Lu, M., Watson-Manheim, M. B., Chudoba, K. M. & Wynn, E. (2014) Virtuality and Team Performance: Understanding the Impact of Variety of Practices. *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*. Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 4-23.
- Martins, L. L., Gilson, L. L. & Maynard, M. T. (2004) Virtual Teams: What Do We Know and Where Do We Go From Here? *Journal of Management*. Vol. 30, No. 6, pp. 805-835.
- Meredith, J. (1998). Building operations management theory through case and field research. *Journal of Operations Management*. Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 441-454.
- Metsä-Tokila, T. (2017) Kasvun mahdollistajat - toimialaraportti ohjelmistoalasta ja teknisestä konsultoinnista. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2017102550274>, [6.2.2018].
- Miller, V. D. (1996) An Experimental Study of Newcomers' Information Seeking Behaviors during Organizational Entry. *Communication Studies*. Vol. 47, No. 1-2, Spring/Summer 1996, pp. 1-24.
- Miller, V. D. & Jablin, F. M. (1991) Information Seeking during Organizational Entry: Influences, Tactics, and a Model of the Process. *Academy of Management Review*. Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 92-120.
- Meyer, J. P. & Allen, N. J. (1988) Links Between Work Experiences and Organizational Commitment During the First Year of Employment: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*. Vol. 61, No. 3, pp. 195-209.
- Morrison, E. W. (1993) Newcomer Information Seeking: Exploring Types, Modes, Sources, and Outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 557-589.
- Myers, K. K. & Oetzel, J. G. (2003) Exploring the Dimensions of Organizational Assimilation: Creating and Validating a Measure. *Communication Quarterly*. Vol. 51, No. 4, Fall 2003, pp. 438-457.
- Nicholson, N. (1984) A Theory of Work Role Transitions. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 172-191.

- Oshri, I., Kotlarsky, J. & Willcocks, L. P. (2007) Global software development: Exploring socialization and face-to-face meetings in distributed strategic projects. *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*. Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 25-49.
- Oshri, I., Kotlarsky, J. & Willcocks, L. (2008) Socialization in a global context: Lessons from dispersed teams, in Pantelli, N. & Chiasson, M. (eds.) *Exploring Virtuality within and beyond Organizations. Social, Global and Local Dimensions*. New York, NY, USA: Palgrave MacMillan. pp. 21-54.
- Ostroff, C. & Kozlowski, S. W. J. (1993) The Role of Mentoring in the Information Gathering Processes of Newcomers during Early Organizational Socialization. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 170-183.
- Picherit-Duthler, G., Long, S. D. & Kohut, G. F. (2004) Newcomer Assimilation in Virtual Team Socialization, in Godar, S. H. & Ferris, S. P. (eds.) *Virtual and Collaborative Teams: Process, Technologies and Practice*. Hershey, PA, USA: Idea Group, Inc. pp. 115- 132.
- Reichers, A. E. (1987) An Interactionist Perspective on Newcomer Socialization Rates. *Academy of Management Review*. Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 278-287.
- Ritti, R. R. & Funkhouser, G. R. (1987) *The Ropes To Skip & The Ropes to Know: The Inner Life Of An Organization*. New York, NY, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 275 p.
- Rollag, K. Parise, S. & Cross, R. (2005) Getting New Hires Up to Speed Quickly. *MIT Sloan Management Review*. Vol. 46, No. 2, Winter 2005, pp. 35-41.
- Saks, A. M., Uggerslev, K. L. & Fassina, N. E. (2007) Socialization tactics and newcomer adjustment: A meta-analytic review and test of a model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 413-446.
- Salovaara, A. & Tuunainen, V. (2013) Software Developers' Online Chat As An Intra-Firm Mechanism For Sharing Ephemeral Knowledge. In *International Conference on Information Systems 2013 Completed Research Papers*. pp. 1-19.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2009) *Research methods for business students*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Harlow, UK: Prentice Hall, 614 p.
- Schein, E. H. (1971) The individual, the organization, and the career: A conceptual scheme. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*. Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 401-426.
- Schwaber, K. & Beedle, M. (2002) *Agile software development with Scrum*. Upper Saddle River, NJ, USA: Prentice Hall, 158 p.
- Shin, Y. (2004) A Person-Environment Fit Model for Virtual Organizations. *Journal of Management*. Vol. 30, No. 5, pp. 725-743.

- Sim, S. E. & Holt, R. C. (1998) The Ramp-Up Problem in Software Projects: A Case Study of How Software Immigrants Naturalize. In *Proceedings of the 20th International Conference on Software Engineering*. Kyoto, Japan: IEEE, pp. 361-370.
- Slaughter, J. E. & Zickar, M. J. (2006) A New Look at the Role of Insiders in the Newcomer Socialization Process. *Group & Organization Management*. Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2006, pp. 264-290.
- Sproull, L. & Kiesler, S. (1986) Reducing Social Context Cues: Electronic Mail in Organizational Communication. *Management Science*. Vol. 32, No. 11, pp. 1492 - 1512.
- Stohl, C. (1986) The Role of Memorable Messages in the Process of Organizational Socialization. *Communication Quarterly*. Vol. 34, No. 3, Summer 1986, pp. 231-249.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) *Basic of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage Publications, 270 p.
- Teboul, J. C. B. (1994) Facing and Coping with Uncertainty during Organizational Encounter. *Management Communication Quarterly*. Vol. 8, No. 2, November 1994, pp. 190 -224.
- Tuomi, J. & Sarajärvi, A. (2009). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Helsinki, FI: Tammi, 175 p.
- Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1974) Judgement under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. *Science*. Vol. 185, No. 4157, pp. 1124 -1131.
- Van Maanen, J. (1978) People Processing: Strategies of Organizational Socialization. *Organizational Dynamics*. Vol.7, No. 1, Summer 1978, pp.19-36.
- Waldeck, J. H., Seibold, D. R. & Flanagin, A. J. (2004) Organizational Assimilation and Communication Technology Use. *Communication Monographs*. Vol. 71, No. 2, June 2004, pp. 161-183.
- Wanous, J. P. (1980) *Organizational Entry: Recruitment, Selection, and Socialization of Newcomers*. Reading, MA, USA: Addison-Wesley, 223 p.
- Weiss, H. M. (1977) Subordinate Imitation of Supervisor Behavior: The Role of Modeling in Organizational Socialization. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*. Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 89-105.
- Zahedi, M. & Babar, M. A. (2016) Why does site visit matter in global software development: A knowledge-based perspective. *Information and Software Technology*. Vol. 80, December 2016, pp. 36-56.

## Appendix A: Interview structure for newcomers

### Background:

- 1) What is your role and when did you start working here? Have you already started working in a specific team or have you only had introductory stuff?
- 2) Can you recall what made you consider this company and finally to apply?
- 3) So far, have you been satisfied with your work and the company?
- 4) Did you get the picture during the interviews that the company was looking for something particular (e.g. skills, behaviors, values, etc.)?

### Orientation:

- 1) What kind of orientation have you had to get into your role and the company? Have you had any other trainings or social activities (e.g. dinner, after work), or did you start working immediately? How have these activities helped you to fit in to the company? Is there something that could have been done better?
- 2) Have all orientation activities so far followed in some logical order, and what was the purpose of these activities?
- 3) What has worked especially well and helped you to settle in? Has there been something that has made it difficult for you to adjust and learn, and why?
- 4) Is it clear what is expected from you, i.e. what level of performance or what kind of deliverables? What information would you need so the expectations would be clearer?

### Others & socialization:

- 1) Have you been assigned an own mentor to help you with becoming a member of the company and your team? How has he or she helped you to fit in?
- 2) In general, how did other organizational members (also those working in other locations) welcomed you when you joined? How have they helped you to start working on your tasks?
- 3) Have you noticed any resistance towards you from the other local team members or from other locations?

### Organizational Culture:

- 1) How would you describe the company's organizational culture? Are there some specific behaviors according to which you are expected to work?
- 2) How you have understood the different company values? How well are these aligned with your own values and previous experiences?
- 3) The company is trying to transfer and build up the same organizational culture that they have in Finland to Romania – do you think that this is possible, or have you noticed that some kind of own culture is being built at the Romanian site?
- 4) Is your national culture visible somehow in your ways of working? Traditionally, Romania has been described as a culture where people expect vertical leadership.

### Technology:

- 1) What kind of collaboration and communication tools you have, and how do these support your work? How have you used various collaboration tools to share or get knowledge within the office, and on other hand, between Romania and Finland?
- 2) Do you have pointed contact person in Finland if you would need something? Who have you communicated with in Finland so far, and how often?

### Information:

- 1) How have you acquired the information that you need in order to start working on your assignments? Have you used any technologies to acquire information (e.g. from a person or from manuals)?

- 2) When you think about your information-seeking attempts, have you usually asked directly someone? Or, have you observed someone to perform a task or monitored what is important to others?
- 3) What types of information have you acquired the most by yourself? (Task-related, what is expected or required from you, common norms and values, to receive feedback, etc.)
- 4) When you think about the information sources, what are the most important sources for you to seek information from (e.g. supervisors, co-workers, virtual sources, etc.)?
- 5) Do you think that information sharing has been difficult between Romania and Finland since you cannot observe or asked them directly? Why, why not?

**Teamwork:**

- 1) You have various guidelines to follow in your team (e.g. related to Scrum), have you noticed that someone would not follow the company guidelines? Is it allowed to differ from common practices, e.g. when you are in a hurry?
- 2) You are expected to be a self-organized team, what does that mean in practice?
- 3) Would you say that your team is already “glued together”, i.e. functioning well or do you have any tensions between your team members (in Romania and between Romania and Finland)?

## Appendix B: Interview structure for additional interviews

### **Back in Romania:**

- 1) What are your general feelings and experiences after coming back from Finland and starting to work here at the Romanian office?
- 2) Was it difficult to come back and reconstruct all you learned about the culture and common practices as daily-guidelines, and start working as expected?
- 3) When looking back, was the orientation period helpful or did it feel like you are starting from scratch when you came back? Would you do it differently now?
- 4) Is it clear, what is expected from you, e.g. level of performance or deliverables? What information would you need so the expectations would be clearer?

### **Technology:**

- 1) How do the different collaboration tools support or hinder your work?
- 2) How have you used these to share or get knowledge (e.g. between Romania and Finland)?
- 3) Do you have any particular persons in Finland to which you turn for help?
- 4) How often do you communicate with people from other locations?

### **Culture in Romania:**

- 1) The company is trying to transfer and build the same organizational culture that they have in Finland to Romania. Do you think that this is possible, or have you noticed that some kind of own culture is being built here at the Romanian site?
- 2) Does it fit or differ from the general company culture that you learned and experienced during your orientation in Finland?

### **Teamwork:**

- 1) Would you say that your team is already “glued together”, i.e. functioning well or do you have any tensions between your team members (in Romania and between Romania and Finland)?
- 2) How have you helped the newest team members to fit in to the organization and your team?

### **Information seeking & sharing:**

- 1) Since coming back, do you think that information sharing has been difficult between Romania and Finland since you cannot observe, and you have to use the communication tools?
- 2) What information have you acquired with the help of different technologies (e.g. task-related, common norms and values, etc.)?
- 3) When you think about the information sources, what are the most important sources for you when seeking information (e.g. supervisors, co-workers, virtual sources)?

### **Additional questions:**

- 1) So far, have you been satisfied with your work and the company?
- 2) What are your own expectations and goals when thinking 6 months or even one year ahead?

### **Other questions (if not asked in the first interview):**

- 1) Based on your experience, what has been the most effective activities that have helped you to adjust? Could the company had done something differently/better?
- 2) Have you been in close contact with your mentor in Finland? How he or she has helped you to fit in after you came back to Romania? Or, have the other team members helped you to fit in, and how?
- 3) When you think about your information-seeking attempts, have you usually asked directly from someone (e.g. local team members, Finnish team members)? Have you observed someone to perform a task or monitored what is important to others?



## Appendix C: Interview structure for organizational insiders

### Background:

- 1) Can you first tell me, what is your role and how long have you been working here?
- 2) We are studying how the new Romanian R&D team adopts to the company's ways of working, so can you briefly describe the company culture and ways of working?
- 3) How does the R&D team here in Finland work? Do you have any processes or ways of working that you follow here (e.g. Scrum)?

### Romanian R&D team:

- 1) Can you tell me, what is your first impression of the new Romanian team?
- 2) Are you often in close connections with the new unit or does the different R&D teams here in Finland and in Romania work separately from each other?
- 3) Can you describe how the communication in general works between Finland and Romania? Have you noticed any problems or gaps in communication that might have caused some difficulties?
- 4) Have you noticed any differences in the way the Romanian team works compared to your team's ways of working? Or are the teams working the same way throughout the company?
- 5) Are you yourself already used to the global thinking when it comes to the whole software R&D department? Or, do you still feel that it's difficult to remember the others in Romania? And, the other way around as well, do you feel the Romanian teams sometimes forget to communicate with you guys?
- 6) And relating to this global thinking – have you had any kind of training when the new Romanian unit was established?
- 7) What is your initial experience while working with the Romanian unit? Can you give me an example that has stuck in your mind? Have you noticed any pain points or problems that might have made it difficult to cooperate?

### New employees:

- 1) Do you know all the new employees from Romania or just some of them (e.g. those who were in Finland for their orientation)?
- 2) As mentioned, some of the new employees were here in Finland – how was it? Can you recall any examples of your negative and positive experiences with them?
- 3) After the newest employees have started during summer, have you met them in person via Skype or have you perhaps visited the new Romanian office already?
- 4) Compared to those new employees who did not visit Finland, do you feel it has been useful to meet the new Romanian team members in person when thinking from the collaboration point-of-view?
- 5) How has the Finland R&D unit accepted the new Romanian unit? Have you noticed any resistance or negative feelings toward the new unit? Have you heard about any conflicts or problems that might have occurred?
- 6) How well do you think the new employees have integrated into the company?
- 7) How have you yourself helped and supported the new employees to feel themselves welcomed?

### Additional questions:

- 1) How have you understood the reasons for the establishment of the new Romanian office?
- 2) What are the goals of the new office from your perspective (e.g. giving the Romanians ownership, etc.)?

## Appendix D: A list of codes

### Open codes

Anticipatory\_Interviews content  
 Anticipatory\_Motivation behind joining company  
 Collaborative climate\_Finland side  
 Collaborative climate\_Romania side  
 Communication\_Practices  
 Drivers of work motivation  
 Entry\_Communication about purpose of orientation program to nc  
 Entry\_Finland activities/lessons learned  
 Entry\_Finland\_Language  
 Entry\_Finland\_Structure of program  
 Entry\_Initial experiences  
 Entry\_Orientation program\_Activities/Lessons learned  
 Entry\_Role of mentoring  
 Entry\_Romania activities/lessons learned  
 Entry\_Social activities  
 Entry\_Understanding of reasons behind activities  
 Information seeking tactics\_Acquired from others  
 Information seeking tactics\_Cultural differences  
 Information seeking tactics\_NC initial expectations  
 Information seeking tactics\_Provided by the org  
 National culture differences  
 Org culture\_Characteristics  
 Org culture\_Company values  
 Org culture\_Expectations  
 Org culture\_Industry related  
 Org culture\_National culture  
 Org culture\_Transfer expectations  
 Org description (eg practices or structure)  
 Outcome\_Assimilation gap  
 Outcome\_Facilitators of assimilation success  
 Outcome\_Organization\_Social integration  
 Outcome\_Sign of assimilation success  
 Outcome\_Team\_Social integration  
 Person organization fit\_Own perception of fit  
 Person organization fit\_What company looked for  
 Personal goals  
 Physical colocation\_Influence on assimilation  
 Previous work experience\_Comparison  
 Role description  
 Romanian unit\_NC & formal expectations  
 Romanian unit\_Establishing the unit in Romania  
 Romanian unit\_Inclusion in leadership  
 Romanian unit\_Initial experiences  
 Romanian unit\_Office space expectations  
 Romanian unit\_Description  
 Team skills  
 Team work\_NC expectations of how to collaborate  
 Team work\_Practices\_Agile  
 Team work\_Task delegation  
 Technology\_Description  
 Technology\_Influence on assimilation  
 Technology\_Knowledge transfer/information seeking

## Appendix E: A list of the whole data structure

1st order concepts	2nd order concepts	Aggregate dimensions	High-level groups
Technical part	Job interview structure	Anticipatory activities	<b>Anticipatory stage</b>
Behavioral part	Job interview structure	Anticipatory activities	
Company introduction	Job interview structure	Anticipatory activities	
Open discussion	Job interview structure	Anticipatory activities	
Newcomers' values	P-O fit sought by the company	Anticipatory activities	
Teamwork abilities	P-O fit sought by the company	Anticipatory activities	
Greatest growing potential	P-O fit sought by the company	Anticipatory activities	
Fit with organizational values	P-O fit sought by the company	Anticipatory activities	
Opportunity to gain ownership	Motivation to join the company	Anticipatory activities	
New team	Motivation to join the company	Anticipatory activities	
New business	Motivation to join the company	Anticipatory activities	
Not an outsourcing company	Motivation to join the company	Anticipatory activities	
Own products	Motivation to join the company	Anticipatory activities	
Overview of the company	Purpose of orientation	Socialization tactics	<b>Socialization tactics</b>
Meet people	Purpose of orientation	Socialization tactics	
Learn how to work	Purpose of orientation	Socialization tactics	
Learn the culture and values	Purpose of orientation	Socialization tactics	
Learn the process	Purpose of orientation	Socialization tactics	
Program was pre-arranged	Orientation program activities	Socialization tactics	
Company-specific trainings (e.g. company values)	Orientation program activities	Socialization tactics	
Mandatory trainings (e.g. the processes, the tools)	Orientation program activities	Socialization tactics	
Documentation to be read	Orientation program activities	Socialization tactics	
Workshops about cultural differences	Orientation program activities	Socialization tactics	
Onsite orientation in Finland	Timing - negative experience	Socialization tactics	
Orientation after three or more weeks	Timing - negative experience	Socialization tactics	
Orientation less than three weeks	Timing - positive experience	Socialization tactics	
Asking questions	Overt asking	Information seeking	<b>Face-to-face activities</b>
Documentation provided by the organization	Organization-driven information	Information seeking	
Observing how the team is collaborating	Observing	Information seeking	
Practice what have been learned	Learning by doing	Information seeking	
To improve and motivate	Feedback from others	Information seeking	
Main point of contact	Responsibilities of mentors	Formal mentoring	
Helping with technical issues in the beginning	Responsibilities of mentors	Formal mentoring	
Introducing new people	Responsibilities of mentors	Formal mentoring	
Answering all the questions	Information seeking	Formal mentoring	
Providing more information	Organization-driven information	Formal mentoring	
Help from local colleagues	Information seeking	Informal mentoring	
Information provided by the insiders	Organization-driven information	Informal mentoring	
Providing information and contacts	Role of informal mentor	Informal mentoring	
Meeting people to know who to contact	Meeting people	Site visits	
Social activities to know people	Social activities	Site visits	
Meeting people to ease communication	Communication	Site visits	
Common language	Language	Site visits	
To prevent conflicts	Conflicts	Reasons for site visits	
Experience sharing	Learning	Reasons for site visits	
Meeting people to understand their work context	Meeting people	Reasons for site visits	
Face-to-face communication to prevent conflicts	Communication	Reasons for site visits	
Asking help from local team	Information seeking	Co-location & collaboration	
Informal social activities to know people	Social activities	Co-location & collaboration	
Collaboration easy in same location	Collaboration	Co-location & collaboration	
Communication easy in same location	Communication	Co-location & collaboration	
What tools is being used	Communication tools	Technologies in use	<b>Virtual activities</b>
How these are used	Communication practices	Technologies in use	
Related to the ways tools function	Possible problems	Technologies in use	

Different preferences	Possible problems	Technologies in use	
Difficulties when interpreting online messages	Possible problems	Technologies in use	
Common approach	Possible solutions	Technologies in use	
Intranet	Information sources	Information seeking	
Different wikispaces	Information sources	Information seeking	
Other colleagues	Overt asking	Information seeking	
Product-related information	Reasons for seeking information	Information seeking	
Technical information	Reasons for seeking information	Information seeking	
Workload of org insiders	Possible problems	Information seeking	
Time needed to get an answer	Possible problems	Information seeking	
Role of site visits	Possible solutions	Information seeking	
Use of communication tools	Communication practices	Distributed teams	<b>Distributed teams</b>
Amount of interactions	Communication practices	Distributed teams	
New team	Learning to communicate	Distributed teams	
Get used to communication tools	Learning to communicate	Distributed teams	
Forgetting the existent of the new site	Learning to collaborate	Distributed teams	
Same product	Possible problems	Distributed teams	
Not knowing the overall picture	Possible problems	Distributed teams	
Communication blocks creating more blocks	Possible problems	Distributed teams	
Not knowing the other team members	Possible problems	Distributed teams	
The importance of site visits	Possible solutions	Distributed teams	
	Team integration	Sign of assimilation	<b>Assimilation outcomes</b>
	Organization integration	Sign of assimilation	
	Reaching the same level	Assimilation timeline	
	Unclear expectations	Assimilation timeline	
	Gaining more experience	Assimilation timeline	
	Assimilation gap	Assimilation gap	
	Different ways of working	Assimilation gap	
	Future expectations	Assimilation gap	